National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

NL-339 (r. 88/04) c

Canada

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-55595-5

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

From Alienation to Community-Building: A Study of Theme and Structure in Gwen Pharis Ringwood's Regional Drama

by

Tina Petersen (C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

Department of English

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Fall, 1989

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR Tina Petersen

TITLE OF THESIS From Alienation to Community-Building: A Study of Theme and Structure in Gwen Pharis Ringwood's Regional Drama

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED Master of Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED Fall 1989

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

(SIGNED) Tina L. Petersen

PERMANENT ADDRESS:

c/o Dept. of English, Hum. 3-5
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2E5

DATED 22 August 1989

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled From Alienation to Community-Building: A Study of Theme and Structure in Gwen-Pharis Ringwood's Regional Drama submitted by Tina Petersen in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Diane E. Bessai

Supervisor

B.A. Maycock

Carl Hare

Date Aug. 28, 1989

DEDICATION

For my father, Tom, my mother, Ulla,

and my sisters, Lone and Mette.

ABSTRACT

The theatre was the formative influence on Gwen Pharis Ringwood, a forum where she was independently exploring various forms of drama. Throughout her career from tragic naturalism to folk comedy and epic drama, the playwright was also continually exploring new themes. Both as a dramatist and regional writer she takes her place in the literary tradition of Western Canada.

Ringwood's formative years were strongly influenced by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, Frederick Koch and Robert Gard. Her first group of plays were dark and austere tragedies of the 1930s on the Alberta prairie. In her early tragedies, Ringwood was exploring some of the same themes as the prairie novelists Frederick Phillip Grove and Sinclair Ross: the alienating struggle of the settler with his environment; his disappointed material ambitions; the effect of isolation and alienation on personal relations. But unlike the fiction writers, Ringwood was also writing comedies of prairie life, folk comedies exploring community values, local folk heroes and various ethnic groups. Her work for the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project and the three commissioned comedies freed her from tragedy in the farcical comedies and folk comedies. Ringwood ended her career with musical plays that mix an explorative theatricality with the original tragic element.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Diane Bessai for her patience and professional advice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
BIOGRAPHY	1
I. THE FORMATIVE YEARS	5
II. THE EARLY TRAGEDIES	17
III. FOLK COMEDIES AND REGIONAL HISTORY	39
IV. FARCICAL COMEDIES AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING	64
V. TRAGIC MUSICAL DRAMA	84
CONCLUSION	109
BIOGRAPHY NOTES	113
WORKS CITED	118
WORKS CONSULTED	121

Gwen Pharis Ringwood was instrumental in creating a western Canadian theatre and drama. Between 1935 and 1984 she wrote twenty-four plays with a western setting that were produced in many school, community, and university theatres. As a young playwright she also played an important role in the formation of the Banff School of Fine Arts. Ringwood has been acknowledged as a seminal playwright of the inter-war amateur period of Canadian theatre, but only recently have critics begun to recognize her place in the general literary tradition of western Canada.[1]

Ringwood is essentially a regional playwright. Throughout her writing career she responded creatively to the places where she was living, on the prairies until early middle age and in the interior of British Columbia for the last third of her life. Although the prairie is her primary region, the subject of half her plays and much of her best work, she later explored British Columbia settings in connection with her increasing interest in the Indian peoples. This in turn reflected back on the prairie themes of her maturity, specifically in the play Mirage. Therefore the thesis will examine her growth as a playwright through a specific focus on the prairie plays. This will also provide a further opportunity to establish her relationship to such major fiction writers of her generation as Frederick Phillip Grove, Martha Ostenso and Sinclair Ross.

Gwen Pharis was born in Washington State in 1910, but moved to Magrath, southern Alberta, with her family in 1913. Her father was a farmer as well as a teacher, and together with his wife he managed both to farm and to teach while bringing up four children, Gwen and her three younger brothers.

In 1929, Gwen Pharis enrolled at the University of Alberta,

graduating with a B.A. in 1934. While still a student, she began to work with Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, Drama Instructor and Head of the Drama Division of the Department of Extension, and travelled with her as her secretary all over the province of Alberta to help develop community theatre and drama-in-education. In the course of the five years that she worked closely with Haynes (1933-1937), Gwen Pharis wrote and had produced her first play, The Dragons of Kent (1935); moreover, between 1936 and 1937, she collaborated with Elsie Park Gowan to write ten radio plays for the University of Alberta's CKUA radio series, "New Lamps For Old." She was also seriously involved in the work Haynes was carrying out at the newly founded Banff School of Theatre (later in 1933 it became the Banff School of Fine Arts), to which Gwen Pharis was appointed first registrar.

Her talents as a playwright and her flair for language impressed the lengendary Professor Frederick Koch when he was invited to teach at Banff in the summer of 1937. Through his and Haynes's encouragement and help, Gwen Pharis obtained a Rockefeller Foundation grant to study drama for two years at the University of North Carolina with Koch and The Carolina Playmakers. These were two very productive years for her she had five plays produced at Chapel Hill and received a high quality of criticism not only from fellow students, but also from Frederick Koch and distinguished writers such as Paul Green and Samuel Selden. She graduated in 1939 with an M.A. and returned to Alberta where she married physician John Brian Ringwood.

During the next forty years Ringwood put to work the tools and craftmanship that she had been given by Elizabeth Haynes and Frederick

Koch. She explored various modes of drama, extending from tragedy to comedy and musical, as well as two novels and a number of short stories which remain unpublished. In the early forties, she moved with her husband to various parts of the Canadian west, including Goldfields in northern Saskatchewan, where she was inspired to write the comedy The Courting of Marie Jenvrin. In 1943, Dr. Ringwood joined the army and went overseas; that same year her two younger brothers were killed in action, a devastating loss for her. The following year she was commissioned to write three plays about Alberta for Professor Robert Gard's Alberta Folklore and Local History Project (1943-1945). The acquaintance with Gard provided a new source of inspiration and her three plays, The Jack and the Joker (1944), The Rainmaker (1944) and Stampede (1946) all had successful productions at the Banff School of Fine Arts. In 1946, when Ringwood's husband returned from the war, the family moved to Lamont, Alberta, but in 1948 returned to Edmonton, where Dr. Ringwood set up his medical practice. During the next four years and while teaching at the Banff School of Fine Arts, Ringwood wrote short fiction, largely for children, but more notably the Ukrainian comedy The Drowning of Wasyl Nemitchuk or A Fine Coloured Easter Egg (1950) and Widger's Way (1952). In 1953, the Ringwoods and their four children settled at Williams Lake, B.C. Gwen Ringwood quickly became involved in community theatre activities and initiated the popular "coffeehouses," evenings of drama for the people of Williams Lake. She also worked closely with the Chilcotin and Shuswap Indians, the tribes that appear in her Drum Song: An Indian Trilogy (1982).

On retirement, the Ringwoods moved to Chimney Lake, B.C., where Gwen

Ringwood continued to write plays, to explore new forms of theatre, and also to give lectures across the west. In 1971, the Gwen Pharis Ringwood Outdoor Theatre in Boitanio Park, Williams Lake, B.C., was opened as a tribute to her efforts and hard work in creating a community theatre in this part of B.C. During the mid-seventies, she also wrote and had produced two plays, The Lodge (1975) and A Remembrance of Miracles (1976). In 1979, Mirage, a play with music about the lives of the three generations of the Ryland family on the Saskatchewan prairie, and the most theatrically complex of her works, was staged in Saskatoon.

Gwen Pharis Ringwood died in May 1984, leaving behind a substantial body of plays, twenty-four in all, the product of an entire lifetime devoted to the development of a western Canadian theatre tradition. Since, for the most part, her works preceded the era of professional theatre in Canada, they were never produced by fully professional theatre companies. However, in the formative years of her career Ringwood was fortunate in her association with such notable theatre people as Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, Frederick Koch and Robert Gard

I. THE FORMATIVE YEARS

For Ringwood, Haynes was the seminal influence. It is necessary first to trace the history of theatre in Alberta before Haynes arrived in order to recognize her achievement as a drama instructor. As Ross Stuart notes, the first active theatre group in Edmonton was the Edmonton Amateur Dramatic Company, which started in 1896. The railroad had reached Edmonton in 1891 and with the arrival of immigrants and new settlements the demand for entertainment grew. This amateur group performed in schools, church halls, and barns or in any other larger place that did not require much financing. In 1892 W. Robertson, the Sheriff of Edmonton, built a hall which served as the main theatre, for groups who could afford it, until it burned down in 1906. The few theatre groups from the East that toured the West in the late spring and the summer of each season staged their plays there. In 1906, Alexander Cameron opened the Edmonton Opera House (later the Dominion Theatre). Cameron opened a number of small theatres that soon closed because of the lack of theatre groups in the west. The Empire Theatre, built in 1920, became the finest theatre to house professional as well as amateur groups, such as the Edmonton Little Theatre, until it, like the ones before, ceased operation, this time because of the outbreak of the Second World War (Stuart 104).

In 1917, roughly between the end of the touring period of professional groups from the east and the beginning of the amateur period in the late 1920s, the Chautauqua (founded in 1884) was brought to western Canada from the United States. It combined education and entertainment in the form of plays, music and lectures to the most isolated of areas on the prairies as well as to the major cities of the

region. The performers were mostly young professionals or university students who were able to travel all summer with the companies. The huge brown tent, in which all performances took place, soon became the symbol of the cultural movement (Stuart 84). The Chautauqua flourished until 1930 when it was forced to withdraw because of deficits. But it had accomplished its aims: it reached places isolated from both education and entertainment and it called for people to participate in community events.

The Edmonton Little Theatre carried on this important work beginning in 1929. Elizabeth Sterling Haynes became its first able director and as a visible sign of its success the Alberta Dramatic League Festival, a yearly event, was born. In 1930, however, the Edmonton Community Players took over the responsibility for encouraging local drama, but like the Little Theatre, suffered financial problems, the lack of an affordable theatre and, to a certain extent, audience enthusiasm; their last season was 1950-51.

The important year for Gwen Pharis Ringwood was 1933, when she was invited to become secretary and assistant to Elizabeth Haynes at the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta. In 1927 Haynes came to Edmonton from Toronto; while a student at the University of Toronto, she had established an acting career under the guidance of Roy Mitchell, the Director of the Hart House Theatre. In 1932, at the request of E.A. Corbett of the Department of Extension, she became Head of the Drama Division of the Department of Extension, a position she held for the next five years. Hayne's job was to be a travelling drama instructor throughout the province of Alberta. She would encourage small theatre groups all over the province and help schools to establish drama classes. The Carnegie Corporation had provided the funding with

two purposes in mind: to promote drama in community theatres and to provide drama courses through educational programs.

In her role as secretary and assistant, Ringwood travelled all over Alberta with Haynes. During those five years, she learned how to act, teach, and write plays. Equally important, her eyes were opened to the scale and proportion of the work needing to be done for drama in the west. Haynes's work in this region of Canada turned out to be of the greatest importance to the development of community theatre. Her special vision of the theatre as a natural expression for the human spirit provided her work and the people who were touched by it with enthusiasm and strength. Moira Day and Marilyn Potts sum up the achievements of Haynes's work in those five years:

> A whole generation of Western Canadian theatre practioners were trained either by Haynes personally or through teaching institutions or methods she helped establish or pioneer. Her five years of rigorous work and experimentation had resulted in a basic model for drama extension work which was to be followed for the next 25 years in Alberta and would profoundly influence the establishment of analogous drama specialist positions in both B.C. and Saskatchewan. (Day and Potts 25)[1]

The foundation of the Banff School of Fine Arts by E.A. Corbett in collaboration with Haynes also occurred in 1933. Ringwood, as its first registrar, was therefore at the centre of the developing school. In a tribute to Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, Ringwood later wrote:

> Elizabeth was a force; a creative energy unleashed at a time when creativity was suspect, and at a place

> where creativity was often ignored in the hope that it would go away.
>
> The Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Theatre has never existed as a building. That, perhaps, is Alberta's shame. But she often quoted her first mentor, Roy Mitchell, as saying, "you do not build a theatre with bricks. You build it with people."
>
> Her theatre exists in the people whose lives she touched. In remembering Elizabeth, let us remember that she demanded greatness. (Day and Potts 32)

Community theatre exists now in almost every corner of the prairies because of Hayne's tireless efforts to involve whole communities in play-acting, be it for sheer entertainment or for teaching purposes in school programs. As did Frederick Koch, she invited people to take part in plays about their own lives, their worlds.

After Ringwood's first play, The Dragons of Kent, was produced at the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1935, she was encouraged, when the opportunity arose, to go on to write radio plays. In 1936-37, Sheila Marryat of CKUA[2] commissioned Ringwood and Elsie Park Gowan to collaborate on the ten-play series "New Lamps For Old"; this project gave both playwrights a useful new experience in dramatic writing. The subjects were biographies of famous people, such as Cromwell, Socrates, Beethoven, and Florence Nightingale. Although not prairie in theme, these scripts gave Ringwood an opportunity to write for the popular audience that the radio of the day, in lieu of live theatre, was trying to reach. Ross Stuart, in his The History of the Prairie Theatre, says of radio drama:

> In Western Canada in particular, radio replaced theatre in many people's lives. Radio provided convenient, economical information, entertainment and culture: in effect it became Canada's national theatre for many years. The radio conquered the difficulties of distance and weather. It also [brought] widely dispersed audiences together. (77)

In other words, the theatre of the rural people was the drama broadcast on the radio. But after the Carnegie grant stopped and the Second World War broke out, the radio station "never regained its dominant position" (Fink 231).

For Gwen Ringwood, 1937 was an eventful year: not only was it to be Elizabeth Sterling Haynes's last as director of the Department of Extension, but also, because Professor Frederick Koch of the University of North Carolina had accepted an invitation to teach at Banff, Gwen was admitted to the University of North Carolina (U.N.C.) to study drama with him. The following two years had a lasting impact on Ringwood's playwriting career and on her involvement in the development of a western Canadian culture.

On the basis of the work Ringwood had done in Edmonton and at Banff, she was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to study at Chapel Hill, where she became one of the Carolina Playmakers who benefitted hugely from the very capable and much-loved Professor Koch. Most important, Ringwood was introduced to the idea of the folk play, upon which Koch founded his teaching of the art of drama at Chapel Hill, as he had done at the University of North Dakota, where he founded the

Dakota Playmakers with whom he toured and worked in the years leading up to and during the First World War. In 1919, he took on the position as Head of the Drama Department at U.N.C. and remained there until his death in 1944. Koch acquired his ideas of folk-playwriting from the Irish Literary Revival. What he did at Chapel Hill and in many surrounding states for the creation of a people's theatre resembled the struggle that the Irish Theatre had experienced. During the era of the literary revival, which began in the last decade of the nineteenth century and flourished until the 1920s, people such as Yeats, Gregory and Synge brought to the Irish theatre an emphasis on traditional stories, incidents of contemporary rural life, and the spoken language of the people. The works that fostered the revival were books of Irish legends, folklore and poetry. The Irish literary Theatre, founded by Yeats in 1899, eventually became the well-known Abbey Theatre Company. The fact that Koch's small theatre was situated in such a vast country indicates the magnitude of his task and also of his success and accomplishments when he finally did manage, through touring with The Playmakers, to help communities in neighbouring states to establish theatres of their own. Indeed, the seed was nurtured by Professor Koch's devotion of energy and passion in the pursuit of a people's theatre. Kai Heiberg-Jurgensen, a visiting lecturer at the Carolina Dramatic Art Department, notes of Koch's idea that "there lies the communal power of the theatre--in a participation by the people on both sides of the footlights" (Heiberg-Jurgensen, in Henderson 55).

In order fully to understand Gwen Pharis Ringwood's plays, it is necessary to be acquainted with Koch's philosophy of folk drama. Koch's

definition of folk drama laid the foundation of the work produced by the Carolina Playmakers, and it was one to which Ringwood immediately aspired and remained faithful during her career as a playwright. Koch taught his students to write about what they knew. Beneath this simple notion lay a deeper belief in the use of local material, the life which was known to the particular student of his own region, its people, history, and tradition. "A knowledge of the universal springs from an investigation of the specific" (Henderson 3), Koch said. His definition of folk drama is as follows:

> The term "folk," as we use it, has nothing to do with the folk play of medieval times. But rather it is concerned with folk subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people. For the most part they [the plays] are realistic and human; sometimes they are imaginative and poetic.
>
> The chief concern of the folk dramatist is man's conflict with the forces of nature and his simple pleasure in being alive. The conflict may not be apparent on the surface in the immediate action on the stage. But the ultimate cause of all dramatic action we classify as "folk," whether it be physical or spiritual, may be found in man's desperate struggle for existence and in his enjoyment of the world of nature. The term "folk" with us applies to that form of drama which is earth-rooted in the life of our common humanity. (Henderson 10-11)

Gwen Ringwood had come to Chapel Hill with a sense of belonging to the prairie, across which she had travelled with Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. She had already developed a need to express something of the life of the small communities which she had come to know. At Chapel Hill, Koch's model provided the key to that expression: the idea of a people's theatre with roots in the folk play.

The prairie provided the setting for her early regional plays, wherein she saw a great potential for the folk drama. All her plays deal with man's struggle with his environment, but Ringwood's real strength lies in the ability to create language and dialogue that articulate her characters and relate them to the environment in which they live. Situations and people become universal through this technique which emphasizes the regional focus. As we shall see, "that which is earth-rooted in life" is at the heart of all of Ringwood's plays, tragedies as well as comedies and musicals. Her plays are "earth-rooted" in the sense that she finds her characters and settings from where she lives, and creates imagery of nature out of the setting.

At Chapel Hill, Ringwood was blessed with the company of inspiring teachers and friends. Among them were Paul Green (author of In Abraham's Bosom), Samuel Selden (Koch's replacement in 1944), Koch himself, and Emily Crow (playwright and later Selden's wife). Ringwood's classmates and fellow students functioned as a source of inspiration in so far as they contributed to each other's work with ideas and criticism. Ringwood wrote six plays, five of which she saw produced at Chapel Hill by The Playmakers; her M.A. thesis and first

full-length play, Dark Harvest, was not produced. The plays Chris Axelson, Blacksmith, The Days May Be Long, Still Stands the House, Pasque Flower, One Man's House and Dark Harvest are the product of her two years at the University of North Carolina. Ringwood had the talent to put her professors' and friends' criticism to good use, and without this experience, these particular plays may not have been so successful.

Her meeting with Robert Gard three years after her return to Alberta was another important step in her development. Gard had come from the United States in 1942 to take over Frederick Koch's position at the Banff School of Fine Arts. He was a specialist in folklore, and was consequently awarded a Rockefeller Foundation grant to enable him to do research in Alberta folklore, and thus to provide his students with local materials for playwriting, as well as other creative activities such as painting (Anthony, Gwen Pharis Ringwood 37). Gard started the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project in 1943 and ended it in 1945 with a competition for young and promising playwrights.

Robert Gard's ideas about the importance of regionalism in art and the use of local and native materials as sources for playwriting much resemble those of Frederick Koch. In his book on grassroots theatre in the United States, Gard says: "For in universality lies the soul of great regionalism. Our authors must show us our familiar landscapes; yet their characters must be so created in true patterns of human life that those characters may be recognized and understood anywhere in the world" (Gard, Grassroots Theatre 61). Like Koch, Gard encouraged his students to make the history of their own province, its folk-tales and traditions, the basis for their work.

Ringwood returned to Edmonton in 1943 from two years in Goldfields to take up a commission from Gard to write three plays for his Alberta Folklore and Local History Project. She chose to write regional folk comedies, each focusing on one main historical figure: The Jack and the Joker (1944), about Bob Edwards of the Calgary Eye-Opener; The Rainmaker (1944), about Hatfield, the California rainmaker hired by the small town of Medicine Hat in 1921 to bring rain to the drought-stricken area: and Stampede (1946), about "Nigger" John Ware, an Alberta cowboy, and the Calgary Stampede. All the plays were produced at Banff and published by the University of Alberta Department of Extension.

The year 1943 also saw the publication of E.K. Brown's On Canadian Poetry. It is interesting to note that the whole idea of literary regionalism that had been developing in the west during the preceding twenty years was in itself a challenge to Brown's negative statements on the subject (although it should be noted that Brown was speaking specifically of poetry). As noted above, Gard's work in Alberta at this time and his later writing on the subject of regional theatre express a different view. G.L. Brodersen, a Manitoba critic, specifically cites Ringwood's plays in order to refute Brown's statement that "Regionalist art will fail because it stresses the superficial and the peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion, of the fundamental and universal" (Brown 25). In the context of Ringwood's early drama Brodersen specifically criticizes Brown's view:

> Thus what pure regionalism there is in Still Stands the House does not, in Professor Brown's terms "stress the superficial and the peculiar at the expense...on the

> fundamental and universal." Instead, it gives to the universal, both in situation and character, a local habitation and a name. (4)

It was evident then, during the establishment of a regional western literature, and it is evident now, that Brown failed to recognize the fact that regional literature obtains universality through local setting and background. In order to achieve a national theatre within the great geographical expanse of either United States or Canada, regional theatre must reflect both the present and the past of all that is particular to its region. The individual regions must examine their own roots in order to depict, in a true and faithful way, the common human conditions of all people and regions. The problems and situations faced by characters in Ringwood's drama are certainly local ones, but through local setting the characters are universalised in their human situation and thus can speak to audiences for whom the particular setting or situation may not be familiar. The widespread popularity of Still Stands the House as a performance piece attests to this.[3] The key to the survival and strength of Koch's idea of the folk play is rooted in regionalism.

Gwen Pharis Ringwood's childhood on the Alberta prairie, her work with Elizabeth Haynes and the two years she spent with Koch and The Playmakers laid a solid foundation for her achievements as a playwright. Her formative years in the world of the theatre were dominated by these strong personalities, people who were devoted to the development of the amateur theatre. One might say, it was Ringwood's fortune that she happened to be where she was at the right time. However, Ringwood

herself recognized early in her career a need to write about her own people, her own land. In talking about the Irish writers whose plays she saw and was inspired by, she says: "Their depiction of the fisherfolk, the farmers, the myth and history and political conflict of a non-urban and non-industrial people had a relevance to my own experience and life that was not apparent in the London and Broadway plays that I read" ("Realism and Its Discontents" 5). Already as a girl, Ringwood was sensitively responsive to the land around her and the lives of its people. This intimacy and understanding made her folk plays appealing.

The early tragedies, which will be next discussed, provide the reader with an insight into the depth of Ringwood's understanding of the folk play, with its emphasis on the regional setting, the natural imagery of the land and the "common" people of the prairie. The human figures are given character through their relationship with the land. The land, which at times functions as a character in itself, lies at the centre of all the human conflicts portrayed and sets the tone of the plays. In Still Stands the House, for example, Hester's obsession with the land and the past makes her as austere and harsh as the prairie winter itself. The land lies at the core of Ringwood's prairie drama.

II. THE EARLY TRAGEDIES

In her early tragedies, Still Stands the House, Pasque Flower (one-act plays) and Dark Harvest (a three-act play), of the late 1930s, Ringwood explored the same themes as the prairie novelists F.P. Grove, Martha Ostenso and Sinclair Ross, to mention a few: the alienating struggle of the settler with the environment; his disappointed material ambitions; and the effect of isolation and alienation on personal relations. Ringwood started to write her plays while Grove and Ostenso were still writing but before such novelists as W.O. Mitchell and Margaret Laurence and even before Sinclair Ross's famous As For Me and My House had been published. Ross's short stories, for which Ringwood shows particular affinity, were published in various journals in the 1930s, but she did not actually know his work.[1]

Although Ringwood's focus on the settlers of the prairie and their lives seems much the same as that of Grove and Ostenso, the outcome in these plays is different. Grove and Ostenso, in writing about the oppressiveness of a patriarchal system, end on a pessimistic note. Ringwood's early tragedies, although preoccupied with the same themes, move slowly toward a more optimistic view; from the stark Still Stands the House to the more hopeful but somewhat romantic Pasque Flower to the community-oriented Dark Harvest. The hardships and sufferings of the inhabitants of the prairie, with the isolating effect of long rough winters and summer droughts, were native to Ringwood, who had spent her childhood on the family farm in southern Alberta.

The hope for something better after each struggle that nature brought about was essential to the survival of these people; Ringwood caught that spirit of hope in the last two of the three plays.

Still Stands the House, Pasque Flower and Dark Harvest are all set in the Depression years of the 1930s. They all deal with man's struggle against the environment and his failure to adjust to it. Man's spiritual strength and worth are measured by his struggle with the land; that measure ultimately provides the message of these tragedies. Bruce and Ruth, of the dark and austere Still Stands the House, die; the house (a symbol of the pioneer spirit) is desolate and will with time crumble to the ground; despite Jake's material ambitions and consequent neglect of Lise in Pasque Flower, they unite in their personal marital struggle; and although Gerth Hansen commits suicide at the end of Dark Harvest, nevertheless the most positive play of the three, he has grown to self-recognition in his struggle, and the alternative of community commitment is represented in the survivors. Thus, the prevailing tone of the last two plays offers some hope for man in the end. The human spirit may suffer, but it is never entirely crushed. The progression in these three plays is also a sign of the playwright's own need to come to terms with the darkness of the Depression and to find a way through it. Still Stands the House is typical of the depictions of the prairie environment in Canadian literature with its tone of starkness and hopeless austerity (we might recall Ross's short stories in The Lamp at Noon and Ostenso's Wild Geese), identifying the negative elements and their impact on the people. Pasque Flower breaks through the darkness with the notion of accommodation between the two characters, Lisa and Jake. But because the play ends on an uncomfortably romantic note, Ringwood decided to work it through again in the three-act structure of Dark Harvest. This extended form allows her more scope for expression of the positive values that she was coming to see in the prairie struggle. However, as we shall see, the one-act play's structure makes Ringwood concentrate on one of her best skills--to compress dialogue and action. In such plays,

she focuses on strong, direct characterization, limited action, and relies on the dialogue to reveal physical as well as mental movement.

Ringwood's three tragedies are naturalistic domestic plays. There is little use of experimental devices, and consequently in a production of any of the three, the energies of the director and the actors must be devoted to the sparse language, the tense dialogues and the degree of austerity in setting. What is important to note is Ringwood's own particular signature on these domestic plays, her poetic language combined with the intensity of setting. The staged space (in two instances interiors) evokes an awareness of the environment beyond the immediate setting and its direct influence on the lives of the characters confined to that space. Linking each of the three plays is a three-way character conflict, although in Dark Harvest it is more expanded and, as mentioned earlier, more community-oriented. As we shall see, Ringwood's major technique in these tragedies is to associate physical symbols (such as Ruth's hyacinths, Hester's obsession with her father's picture, Gerth's wheat, Lisa's pasque flowers) with the characters. The patterning thus materialized in the dialogue is what makes the language poetic. The ascription of human traits to inanimate nature also has the effect of creating a sense of the setting beyond the immediate surroundings (the house in Still Stands the House and the wheat fields in Pasque Flower and Dark Harvest). The contrasts that this method produces articulates the characters and the conflicts existing between them.

Still Stands the House (1939) combines the family present with history at a specific time and place in the life of the Warrens. Set in

the drought-stricken prairie of the thirties, it exhibits the powerful imagery characteristic of its contemporary western Canadian prairie fiction. The Warrens become victims not only of their deceased father's "unconquerable will" (28)[2] but also of their struggle for survival against the land and the forces of nature. The struggle is not confined to the unruly land, but moves inside the house and creates between the characters a conflict that ultimately ends in tragedy. The land, as mentioned earlier, functions as a main character and the key to the conflicts between the characters. Despite its brevity and simple plot, the play produces a powerful dramatic experience because of the rich and striking use of language and symbolism. More specificaly, the struggle and conflicts both outside and inside these human lives are represented through symbols and patterns of contrast. Elementary symbols prevail in the play (a house, a horse, the hyacinth, the weather and lanterns) and thus reinforce the fact that these people struggle for survival at the most basic level. The pattern of contrasts appears forceful. Birth and spring and flowers and growth all have their opposites in death and winter and snow and repression of sexual instincts. The storm and disorder of the seasons and Hester's madness, which kills Ruth and Bruce, are contrasted with the lanterns, a symbol of civilization that could have saved them both. The lanterns are means of survival for the pioneer on the prairie during the winter--a source of light that can mean life.[3]

The sterility and isolation of the winter season are reflected in the sterility within the house, in Hester, and in the disorder among the characters of the Warren family. In this feature, Ringwood anticipates

Ross's As For Me and My House. The living room has about it "a faded austerity, a decayed elegance that is as remote and cheerless as a hearth in which no fire is ever laid," and "uncompromising severity" (27). The kitchen is dark; the rug and curtains are heavy. Hester Warren is as "dark" (29) in appearance and spirit as the house itself. She is stern and bitter, obsessed with the past (represented through a portrait of Martin Warren, her and Bruce's father). The sterility of Hester's entire life is reflected in the demands she places on Ruth, Bruce's wife, as to how the house must be kept. Hester's obsession with the past and her "relationship" with the house eventually turn to madness. Hester is the house and the prairie; she becomes a symbol of the violence it is capable of exerting. Her condition echoes that of Caleb Gare in Wild Geese who becomes, in the words of the narrator, "as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence" (Ostenso 31).

Hester and the interior are sharply contrasted with Ruth, who is small, dressed in bright colours, blonde and delicate. Raised and educated in town, Ruth longs to return where life to her is orderly, where flowers can grow in the gardens and human companionship can flourish. The winters on the prairie, her vulnerability and fear, make her recall the winters in the town: "I used to like them in town. We went skating on the river and tobogganing. But out here it's different" (28). Ruth is desperately fighting the darkness and the past that Hester and the house itself constantly impose upon her. She is making new colourful curtains (much to Hester's disapproval) and she has brought hyacinths into the living room in an attempt to make a bright

change, "to make the room gay and happy for spring" (31). The flowers represent birth and spring to Ruth (and the hyacinth has a positive symbolic value in being ascribed to Ruth's unborn child), but to Hester flowers "always seem like death" (31).

The conflict between Ruth and Hester comes out in almost every sentence they speak and is rooted in Hester's neurotic obsession with the past. She continues to read the Bible to her father's ghost and sees it as her duty to preserve the house as it has always been. She refuses any change introduced by Ruth and will not even let Ruth touch certain household items. Hester has adopted a hardness throughout the years in order to survive and to be able to cope with the strenuous life on the farm after her mother died. She had to adopt the role of mother (to Bruce), and housekeeper as well as daughter (to her father). She committed herself intensely to her father, to the house, and to the land, and consequently never married. She accuses Bruce of not being true and wholly committed to the will of their father:

> Hester: You have to love a place to make things grow.
> The land knows when you don't care about it, and
> Bruce doesn't care about it anymore. Not like
> Father did. (32)

Instead of marrying the land, as Hester did, Bruce married Ruth, whom Hester now blames for stealing the love that, had Bruce given it to the soil, would have nourished good harvests. Hester fails to recognize that growth and development can only be achieved by keeping pace with the surroundings. She distances herself from reality and this is the ultimate cause for her madness (Hinchcliffe 185).

The conflict with the land breeds conflicts within and among the three characters. Hester and Bruce have never known any other reality, but town-bred Ruth responds to the prairie winter and the house with fear:

> Ruth: ...The wind swirls and shrieks and raises such queer echoes in this old house! It seems to laugh at us in here, thinking we're safe, hugging the stove! As if it knew it could blow out the light and the fire and.... (31)

Like Mrs. Bentley in As For Me and My House and other female characters in some of Ross's short stories, Ruth feels fenced in, isolated and extremely vulnerable. The cold and strange sanity of the madness that inhabits Hester frightens Ruth, and rightly so, since Hester's act in the end (she does not fill the lantern that Ruth takes to go out in the storm to look for Bruce) results in Ruth's and Bruce's deaths. Ruth wants to escape the loneliness of the prairie and wants Bruce to sell the family farm so that they can be closer to the town, civilization and safety. In a way reminiscent of the garden myth popular in early prairie fiction of the 1920s and 1930s, Ruth conceives a vision of harmony with nature:

> Ruth: If you take this offer, we'll be nearer town. We'll have water on the place. We can have a garden, and trees growing.
>
> Bruce: That's about what those irrigated farms are-- gardens.
>
> Ruth: And Bruce, it wouldn't be so lonely there, so

cruelly lonely. (37)

Bruce is caught between the two women, and though both of them and what they stand for have a place in his heart, he knows that they can never be brought together. Although he has "an oppressive sense of failure," he struggles on with the land out of a sense of duty not only to his deceased father, but also to his (unborn) child: "Yes, it's strange that in a soil that won't grow trees, a man can put roots down, but he can" (38).

Each of the characters, then, has a different relationship to the land and the house that results in human conflicts: Hester dominates Ruth and Bruce; Hester and Ruth are absolute contrasts; Bruce is torn between the two, and this tension creates a conflict with each of them separately. Like the land, the house itself functions as a protagonist, again anticipating Ross's <u>As For Me and My House</u>. The snow that covers the land in winter is identified as "a moving shroud, a winding-sheet that the wind lifts and raises and lets fall again" (32). The image of the cloth used to wrap around the corpse emphasizes the austerity and anticipates the deaths that follow. Together with Hester in the end, it stands alone as a dark reminder of the past. Linked with the play's title and Hester's reading of the Bible are these lines from Mark 3:25: "If a house is divided against itself that house will not be able to stand" and indeed Hester and the house are left to wither away in the end. Darkness and death rule in the house and among the characters. Ruth realizes what the condition has done to Hester and Bruce:

Ruth: No! You'd sit in this husk of a house, living
like shadows, until these four walls closed in

on you, buried you. (38)

She also knows that everything that represents growth, fertility and life would die there:

Ruth: ...You two and your father lived so long in this dark house that you forgot there's a world beating outside, forgot that people laugh and play sometimes. And you've shut me out!... He'll be like this hyacinth that's broken before it bloomed. (38-39)

Ruth dies, like the hyacinth Hester has broken, before she has had time to bloom. With Ruth and her unborn child, life itself seems to have vanished from the face of the earth.

The Warrens' failure to adopt to the new condition of the drought-stricken land thus inevitably ends in tragedy and destruction. Still Stands the House can rightly be placed in the central tradition of prairie literature. For, as many settlers before them, the Warrens struggled with the land, strove to impose a foreign structure and order upon it, and the consequence was human destruction. The play ends with Hester's reading of the Bible: "...And the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (43). And so, ironically, it is; founded on something as inanimate as rock, as dead and lifeless, it will with time crumble to the ground and die. So will Hester and her past.

The success of Still Stands the House lies not only in the power of language, but also in Ringwood's ability to characterize. Although Hester and Bruce are people of the prairie, the conflict between Hester

and Ruth as women is universal. The sympathy of the audience goes to Ruth and Bruce who die in their struggle against the prairie storm and Hester. Still Stands the House, Ringwood's first and darkest tragedy, unlike Pasque Flower and Dark Harvest, does not leave any trace of optimism or hope.

Pasque Flower (1939)[4] is another one-act play about the life on the Canadian prairies. Apart from the "free verse" (Broderson 5), intending to emphasize rhythm, of Pasque Flower as opposed to the poetic prose (aiming at imagery) of Still Stands the House, the two plays have much content in common. In Pasque Flower too, there are only three main characters: Jake Hansen, his wife Lisa and his brother David. The setting is the same, a wheat farm in Alberta, and although Lisa is the dominant character in the play, the essence of the drama is the relationship between Jake and Lisa. There are conflicts among all three characters, but Lisa's struggle with herself, and her relationships to Jake and David determine the action and the dialogue.

In Still Stands the House, which takes place during the winter season as opposed to the spring setting in Pasque Flower, Ruth's fear and vulnerability were caused by isolation. Lisa's problem has its roots in much the same feeling. The imagery is the same as in the previous play, though less developed symbolically. The image of the child and the pasque flower itself are the two most emphatic and strong images in Pasque Flower. The poetic language, however, lacks the power and intensity of Still Stands the House. Nevertheless, Pasque Flower remains one of Ringwood's best one-act plays about the prairies. The mood and the tone, the interior of the house and the characters

complement the darkness and austerity of the prairie, which is the cause of the isolation that traps Lisa. As G.L. Brodersen points out, Ringwood's choice of dialogue emphasizes the sterility of Lisa's life:

> ...it is an austere speech, almost without imagery, for the most part not nearly as inherently poetic as much of Gwen Pharis's normal prose, almost barren in the rigid simplicity of its form. Probably this deliberate refusal to handle any form of ornament is part of Gwen Pharis's attempt to convey the sterility of spirit that has come upon Lisa. (Brodersen 8)

The domestic setting of the play, the interior of the Hansen's living room and kitchen, is penetrated by homely warmth and tasteful simplicity. In the opening scene, however, Lisa is found sitting in the dark, aimlessly looking at the fire and crying. It is the anniversary of the death of Lisa and Jake's only child. On the day the child died Jake brought Lisa a bouquet of pasque flowers, a sign of spring on the prairies; upon his return from the town in the opening scene, remembering the anniversary, he has brought her another such bouquet. But, seeing Lisa burdened and absorbed in her sorrow and isolation, he chooses not to give the flowers to her. Instead, he throws them on the table, leaving her unaware of them. The couple have gradually been drifting apart, Jake into his absorption in the land and Lisa into the loss of their child and her loneliness. The tension is heightened by their awaiting the arrival of Jake's brother, David, who is returning briefly to the childhood homestead to see Lisa, whom he loves, before setting up his medical practice in the Yukon. The two brothers have

been rivals since David left the family farm to become a physician, and David's love for Lisa further complicates the relationship. As he approaches Lisa initially, Jake appears to be a hard, unfeeling man, venting his frustration:

> Jake: Sometimes you're a fool, Liz, sometimes I think....
>
> Lisa: Did you bring the mail?
>
> Jake: (Going to her) So you think to put me off! What are you crying for? By heaven, I'm sick of coming in to see that patient face of yours turning away, as if you'd had a sentence to life in prison.... God is my witness, Liz, I don't know what you want. Well, get the meal. (46)

He grows resentful and irritated whenever the conversation concerns David, and Lisa's understanding of David's choice to become a doctor especially annoys Jake. The lack of communication between the two brothers is largely rooted in pride and past misunderstandings. Jake's feelings for David are revealed to the audience before he appears on the stage and when he does the audience is not surprised; rather, it expects his reception to be hostile. Lisa and Jake have just had an argument which has left each of them feeling betrayed by the other, so the ground for David's protestation of his love for Lisa is solid. But Lisa does not yet know that Jake has brought her the flowers, a sign that there is more to him than appears on the surface. It is also a sign not only that Jake needs her, and knows and respects her feelings, but also that he realizes that life must go on. Up until now, his way of dealing with

the loss of their firstborn was to bury himself in work, thus removing himself, unknowingly, from his wife.

Lisa has "a patient hunger in her face" (45) which is caused by the loss of her child, the intensity of isolation on the prairie and the kind of life that she and Jake are living, especially since he spends very little time with her. Like Ruth Warren, Lisa feels that a child would give them both something other than the land to live for. Jake's response measures the lack of communication between the two:

> Lisa: Jake, when I came here eight years ago I thought we'd made a home, I thought you needed me. If the baby'd lived, things would be different, I know that. He'd be three years old tonight. But since he died, you've grown to care for nothing but your land and the power you wring from it.
>
> Jake: A man can get more warmth from an unploughed field that welcomes his hand than from a woman who shuts herself away, peers at him out of the corners of her eyes, expecting the worst from him. (49-50)

The simplicity of language, referred to earlier, is evident in the passage quoted above. Jake's simple, striking characterization of his wife conveys the image of a vulnerable, frightened creature, which is what her unending loneliness has rendered her.

Upon David's arrival Jake leaves the house, and David, finding Lisa upset, almost convinces her to leave Jake and come with him. But when

she sees the flowers that Jake brought for her, she realizes that he, in his own way, needs her and that she in a maternal way needs to care for him. The play ends in a reconciliation between Jake and Lisa, which puts Pasque Flower in a category of its own. This romantic reconciliation is unique for Ringwood's early folk tragedies, and, although it succeeds in this one-act play, it did not entirely satisfy the playwright. It also promises, if only implicitly, a reconciliation between man and the land, however destructive the hardships may be.

The plot and action of Pasque Flower, except for the ending, became Dark Harvest (1939)[5], Ringwood's first full-length prose play. Dark Harvest focuses on both Lisa and Gerth (Jake), though predominantly on Gerth. In Dark Harvest, as in Still Stands the House, Ringwood is preoccupied with the "inappropriate inherited patriarchal values" (Bessai 110).

We have in Gerth Hansen something of Hester, who was obsessed with her love of the house and the land, but there is a stronger and more powerful emphasis in Dark Harvest on the spiritual alienation from the land and the obsession with material progress. Gerth cannot live in harmony with the land because his obsession is founded on anger and a need to control the land. He tries to dominate both nature and his own God, whom, towards the end, he realizes he cannot fight or win over. Gerth (reminiscent of Caleb Gare in Ostenso's Wild Geese [1926] and Abe Spalding in Grove's Fruits of the Earth [1933]) is a dark character because his relation with the land is aggressively materialistic. He is described as "a tall, lean man of about thirty-five with a dark lined face. His eyes are arresting in their blueness under heavy dark brows.

He does not smile easily and is quickly on the defensive" (63). This proud man uses his land as a means of power. His pride and his obsession prevent him from giving Lisa his love and render him incapable of receiving hers. Thus Gerth's hunger for land and Lisa's hunger for love create two different worlds between which the communication is scarce and aggressive:

> Gerth: ...I've worked here day in and day out since I was old enough to drive a team. I've given this place everything I've got except my bones--(with a touch of irony)--and there'll be time enough for that....
>
> Lisa: Not everyone can work the way you do. Some people need a little time to live. (65)

It seems that Gerth is incapable of expressing any emotion unless it is through anger or spite or under threat. He quickly reverts to the defensive when confronted by the spectre of his younger brother David:

> Lisa: (Fiercely) Land! Everything goes back to land with you. David's life is his own to do what he wants with--
>
> Gerth: If David wants to set himself up as better than I, he can go ahead, I've done all right. (69)

Gerth measures his own worth through ownership and Lisa sums it up very clearly: Gerth's obsession with the land is his greatest sin, so to speak, because not only is it destructive, it makes him an insensitive human being:

> Lisa: (Turning to him, bitterly) There's no trouble

> too great for you to take for that field out there. Your wife, your brother, they don't count, as long as you can walk the fields and say, "I own this land--it's mine"--that's all that matters. (70)

Gerth believes that by buying the land, he will master it; that by giving it his identity it will obey. When he offers to put the land he is buying from Al Morrow, a neighbouring farmer, in Lisa's name, he says: "...Maybe if it was yours, if you owned it, you'd come to see why I've wanted it" (72).

There is a strong echo here of Caleb Gare in Wild Geese; he also sees the land as possession, as something someone might come and steal unless it is protected by ownership. As Caleb Gare walks the fields at night, so does Gerth in Act III, unable to find rest (106). Al Morrow, who in the end sets fire to the truck to avenge himself on Gerth, calls Gerth "the wheat King" and "the lord's own chosen" (83). We are all the lord's own chosen, but the phrase is ironic when applied to Gerth who has devoted his life to fighting God, to beating Him at His own game:

> Gerth: ...A man's got to believe in something if he's going to live. I never found any God except what I found out there, the one that lies in the earth and lets things die. And he's blind! He laughs at you; he makes a man a slave for him and laughs. (96)

Al Morrow forsees the future when he says that both Gerth and his farm will go to dust. Gerth and Lisa have no children to hand the farm over

to when they are gone, and it is likely then that the farm will go to a stranger. But Gerth seems incapable of sharing; if he can win his fight against God alone, he will be satisfied. Gerth tragically fails to realize that he cannot control or tame nature. His is an unnatural fight against the elements which is bound to destroy him. He cannot accept the natural order of things. He cannot accept the order of nature: harvests will fail but new ones will succeed. Such an acceptance conflicts with his attempt to immortalize himself and therefore makes him vulnerable. Gerth is handicapped in the fight against nature because his stubbornness and need to master make it impossible for him to be humble in the face of God: "And God's down in the earth there making things die. Blindly, just to show a man how small he is" (110).

Gerth's dark and unnatural obsession with the land deprives his wife Lisa of his love and makes impossible her love for him. As in much prairie fiction, the women in this play are depicted as deprived and emotionally neglected. As in Still Stands the House and Pasque Flower, the conflict with the land dominates the lives of all the characters and creates conflicts among them.

The "brooding sadness" (60) in Lisa's face issues from a longing that remains unfulfilled. She lost a child shortly after it was born, a child that could have given her life greater purpose. She blames Gerth for not being concerned enough to fetch a doctor in time. He spent the time out in the field attending to his land. She needed the child to live for, to love, as Gerth lives for the land. She wants to adopt a child for them to raise, but Gerth shows little sign of understanding.

Julia, the housekeeper, and yet another deserted woman, tries unsuccessfully to convince him on Lisa's behalf:

Julia: It would give you something to work for.

Gerth: (Angrily) I've got enough to work for. (To stop further discussion) You see these heads of wheat? They're full and hard; you can't find another farm in the country with wheat like that this early.

Julia: Sometimes something inside a house can mean more than a full granary outside. (84)

But he is too absorbed and self-centred to see, let alone feel, that Lisa has needs too. It is not surprising, therefore, that she eventually turns to David and gets passionately involved with the plans for a children's hospital. The image of the lost child and the woman's starved need to give maternal care is again a motif as it was in the two previously discussed plays. The land is associated with the male figures, whereas the socially responsible role is associated with the women. A total lack of communication on the emotional level between Gerth and Lisa results from Gerth's obsession with the land. Because what is natural to Lisa appears unnatural to Gerth, they are incapable of sharing:

Gerth: Haven't you enough to do here without trying to play angel of mercy to the whole community?

Lisa: (Suddenly angry) Maybe I don't do it for them! Maybe I do it for myself, to keep myself from thinking or feeling or wanting anything more

> than a good car and a good house and a good farm. To keep myself from remembering what you forgot today--that we had a child once, that I planned for it and loved it and held it in my arms--and that I lost it--but the ploughing got done that year. (70)

Lisa's frustration is so great that she almost gives in to David's love for her. But she stays, out of a sense of duty and perhaps even fear of what Gerth would do if he lost her. Caught up in the isolation and solitude of the life they lead, she finds nothing and nobody to give her love to (93). The conflict between Gerth and Lisa frustrates Lisa more than Gerth. He mainly concerns himself with his own struggle, which leaves her in despair: "...And I can't touch Gerth because we're on different paths. And there's nothing ahead or behind for any of us but just one person walking alone in darkness" (95). The final tragedy of the play extends from the predicament identified by Lisa. Gerth dies alone while trying to save his wheat. To the very end, he fights alone and finally gives in to death. Gerth was fighting an unnatural fight against the nature of things and with his death "his" land is still in nature's hands. Gerth had time to save his life--he could have jumped off the truck in time--but chose death when the opportunity arose. He realized that either he could live as a defeated man who had lost the love of his wife or he could accept his failure. He had finally come to understand that the God he had been fighting was not an enemy but a friend who had helped. Gerth had thus not fought <u>alone</u> and his pride could not bear to share his struggle with anyone:

Gerth: ...When I thought I was holding back, beating him out of something, I wasn't doing it by myself at all. (There is anguish in his tone) I can't do anything alone! I'm not anybody. (110)

Gerth had thus become the victim of his own struggle, his own obsession, an echo of the fate of Caleb Gare and Abe Spaling of Ostenso and Grove's prairie fiction. Like Still Stands the House and Pasque Flower, Dark Harvest examines a conflict that melds the prairie with its inhabitants. Gerth's conflicts with the land and with Lisa and his brother David are inevitable effects of his own struggle. However, Gerth has grown in his struggle and prefers death in the end to humiliation. The emphasis in the end for the remaining principal characters, Lisa and David, is on the strength of social and communal activities (the children's hospital), an indication of the themes Ringwood would go on the explore in her comedies. In Dark Harvest, however, Ringwood explores the evils of an unnatural devotion to the land. As with the male protagonist in much of the early prairie fiction, Gerth is depicted as one who wishes to control, to conquer nature, and who acts and approaches the land through anger which is ultimately self-destructive.

There are some significant differences between the version of 1939 and the revised version of Dark Harvest which appeared in the winter issue of Canadian Theatre Review in 1975 (these revisions arose from the first production of the play). Generally, in the revised version, the dialogue has been considerably edited from its original effusiveness, to focus more precisely on the enclosure and isolation of both Lisa and Gerth individually and their consequent inability to communicate. The

dialogue in Act II between Lisa and Gerth, for example, has been partly removed in the revised version. In the 1939 version, Gerth and Lisa's conversation is exaggerated in a romantic way. The characters come across as stereotypes: Gerth, for example, is the one who turns fiercely on Lisa, whereas she simply pleads and sobs:

> Lisa: Then I was trying to find something that was never there. (Pleading) Gerth, if you've no need for me, I've no place here....
>
> Gerth: You count with the people you carry baskets to, as long as there's food in the baskets. Isn't that enough.
>
> Lisa: Maybe you've got the only answer; maybe work is the only answer there is for people like us, lost people. I thought it was love. I'll go away. (96-97)

None of the above was kept in the revised version in which Lisa seems stronger and more confident. She has shorter and more compressed lines. Also in the revised version, Gerth is not shown to break down and confide in Lisa in the same romantic way. The following incident from the first version seems out of line with his character and this divergence could account for the elimination of it in the revised version in which Ringwood sought to make the characters more believable:

> Gerth: I lied, Lisa. Everything I do is tied up with you. Don't leave me. All I wanted was your love. I didn't need anything else, but it's not that way with you, is it? (97)

The bitterness in Gerth towards his younger brother David in the 1975 version is sharper from the beginning, and David's arrival at the farm is made less romantic and mysterious by his arriving on his own account. Ringwood also updated the setting from pre- to post-Second World War (1944 and 1946). The significant change occurs in the brevity of dialogue. The ending, however, remains the same. Still Stands the House, Pasque Flower and Dark Harvest are regional plays of the Canadian prairie. Ringwood has, in these three plays, used a regional setting to achieve in the end a portrayal of universal characters, relationships and conflicts. During the years that Ringwood spent at Chapel Hill she also experimented with comedy and farce, in the play Chris Axelson, Blacksmith. Within the folk play genre Ringwood turned her interest to the comedy, which opened new opportunities for theatrical experiments. This genre made Ringwood aware of another side to the prairie than the one she had depicted in her tragedies; consequently, her focus in the prairie plays began to change from alienation to community-building in the post-pioneer era. Tragedy had been a suitable form for exploring people in isolation, but as Ringwood moved from an emphasis on the individual to an emphasis on the prairie communities comedy proved itself a comfortable vehicle for her purpose. This development in her playwriting will be examined in the following chapters as the various forms of comedy and variety of topics are considered.

III. FOLK COMEDIES AND REGIONAL HISTORY

The Alberta Folklore and Local History Project aimed at recording "oral historical and traditional material of the region, in [its] celebration of Alberta history and its early pioneers" (Wagner 65). Ringwood's source book for these three plays, The Jack and the Joker, The Rainmaker and Stampede, was Robert Gard's Johnny Chinook (1945). Gard had travelled throughout Alberta collecting the characters and people who created folktale history in the province. Johnny Chinook was, along with a permanent file of western background material at the Univeristy of Alberta, the product of the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project. As well, Gard himself wrote six Alberta folklore plays in 1945 which were published by the University of Alberta's Printing Services. In the foreword to these six plays, Gard writes: "The six plays in this volume were especially written for the Project. They incorporate a good deal of the comic and serious spirit of the Province, and the characters are for the most part, taken from real persons" (Gard, Six Alberta Folklore Plays 1).[1]

Ringwood's three plays were her first serious attempt at writing folk comedies in which the community itself serves as the protagonist (as did the land in the tragedies) in the chosen historical incidents (the Calgary Stampede, Hatfield in Medicine Hat and the controversies surrounding Bob Edwards). Gerth, Jake and other prairie figures of the tragedies were larger-than-life figures, and in the comedies too, the playwright creates larger-than-life figures of the regional folk heroes. This time, however, the plays have an added feature which is the particular historical element and the topics which were deliberately chosen to make people conscious of their own history and province. The celebration of legends is achieved, as we shall see, by Ringwood's setting

them against the larger canvas of the entire community. Comedy not only allowed Ringwood to distance herself from the characters but it also provided her with the framework for portraying what to her were the characteristics of the prairie sense of humour: the special strength of the prairie people to cry and laugh in the midst of hardship (Bessai 10). In each of these three plays, Ringwood blends historical facts with fiction: the tragedies were made of pure fiction with universal history as opposed to the "personal" history that we see in the folk heroes of the comedies. Ringwood does so to bring out the specific qualities of the characters and to cast a new and different light on an incident or time.

Like tragedy, comedy imitates life. But there the likeness ends. As Henri Bergson points out in his essay "Laughter," the comic mode emphasizes the physical, the human, movement and action, and he concludes that laughter is "communal," that the comic has "social significance" (Bergson 215). The communal aspect of the plays that followed the tragedies prevails in the action. In the comedies that do not fall in the category of light comedy or farce (Stampede and The Rainmaker), the human relationships and the comic language are main features. Bergson's definition of light comedy (or farce) is useful to keep in mind for the treatment of Ringwood's farcical comedies, The Courting of Marie Jenvrin, A Fine Coloured Easter Egg, and Widger's Way:

> Not infrequently comedy sets before us a character who lays a trap in which he is the first to be caught. The plot of the villian who is the victim of his own villainy, or the cheat cheated, forms the stock-in-trade

> of a good many plays. We find this even in primitive farce.... This is the real explanation of light comedy, which holds the same relation to actual life as does a jointed dancing-doll to a man walking,--being, as it is, an artificial exaggeration of a natural rigidity in things. The thread that binds it to actual life is a very fragile one. It is scarcely more than a game which, like all games, depends on a previously accepted convention. (Bergson 224-25)

As we shall see, what ties Ringwood's farcical comedies to life is her ability to create character-types which reflect back on the community. Some of the comedies that this and the following chapter will examine also have elements of tragedy. Frye speaks of "the sense of tragedy as a prelude to comedy" (Frye, "The Argument of Comedy" 239) and this will be especially evident in The Rainmaker and Stampede. In his essay, Frye sums up what is true of all the comedies and farces under discussion:

> In all good New Comedy [Roman in the tradition of Plautus] there is a social as well as an individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible.... In the last scene the audience witnesses the birth of a renewed sense of social integration. In comedy as in life the regular expression of this is a festival, whether a marriage, a dance, or a feast.... Comedy is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge. (Frye 237)

Comedy of manners (The Jack and the Joker) examines the way people behave, the manners they use in a particular social context. The style is mostly distinguished by the subtlety of wit and humour which defines the expression and actions. Romantic comedy (The Rainmaker) frequently relies on sounds and music either to break the action or to set the mood of a particular character or scene. Sentimental comedy (Stampede) consists of a combination of pathos and comic elements with the former predominating.

The Jack and the Joker (1943)[2] is Ringwood's attempt at capturing the wit and satirical spirit of the notorious editor of the Calgary Eye Opener, Bob Edwards. Robert Chambers Edwards, Bob Edwards as he was known to westerners, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1864. He received all his education in Scotland and was known to his university professors at Glasgow as having "traits of literary genius" (MacEwan, Eye Opener Bob 12). He arrived in Canada in 1894 after having travelled in Europe and unsuccessfully tried farming in the United States with his brother. During the years as an editor for the Calgary Eye Opener, he provided entertainment and amusement for many people. People had strong opinions about him; either they liked or disliked him. Edwards himself was a complex character who wrote without fear of his readers' opinions; he condemned politicians and yet himself entered politics late in life; he drank heavily, but finally won the battle against alcohol; he loved literature, the theatre, and music. His sarcasm and sharp wit often had ministers of the church condemning him and his newspaper, and at one time even the railroad company refused to sell his paper on trains. In spite of the irregularity of publication of the paper, due to Edwards's

drinking habits, he "achieved the largest circulation of papers published west of Winnipeg" (MacEwan, Eye Opener Bob 9). Consequently, Edwards enjoyed a fair amount of power and influence when it came to elections, opinion polls, politicians and political events. When Robert Chambers Edwards passed away on 14 November 1922, many tributes were paid to him:

> The editor of the Eye Opener was a genius and while his humour was specifically of one locale and one definite period, he was an artist of undeniable form.... There never was an Eye Opener in which the genius of the editor did not shine in some inimitably brilliant sketch or anecdote...a man of sterling qualities, true to his friends and possessed with courage to stand by his convictions...he often showed the mask of frivolity, yet behind that mask was reverence for all that was pure, high and beautiful. Hypocrisy he could not endure. (MacEwan, Eye Opener Bob 224)

Ringwood takes some isolated and factual incidents about Edwards and blends them with a few fictitious characters and time. This is the structural link among the three plays. The Jack and the Joker, however, differs from the two other plays that follow in that Ringwood makes use of neither music nor a large cast. It is set in 1904 in the office of the Sheep Creek Eye Opener (i.e. in High River); all the action takes place there. Bob Edwards manages to keep the local politician, Dudley Carp, and his snobbish wife from steering the good and faithful Mrs. Gudgeon into deeper poverty and dependence. Edwards produces honest

evidence that Carp has sold some useless land to Mrs. Gudgeon (a dramatization of one of the actual incidents narrated by Gard in Johnny Chinook), and makes sure that she is given back her money. In the process, he saves his printing press, which they were about to destroy to prevent him from printing his stories opposing Carp's politics. Edwards thus comes away with both printing press and his freedom of speech, and all ends well.

Ringwood comments on the intolerance and snobbishness of the small-town people through Florence, a newcomer to the town who sells hats:

> Florence: Mr. Edwards you told me Sheep Creek was a nice, quiet town where I could settle down and Bertie could come home week-ends. I thought I'd go to church and visit back and forth and belong to things and raise a family. And here you are, a den of suspicious-minded old dames. I'm not even sure I want to raise a family here.... (To Dorinda) and I think your hat is just awful, so there. (175)

The dialogue, at times, is witty, but Ringwood is cautious in developing a picture of the well-known editor and the special characteristics of his personality. Perhaps she was intimidated by this first try at dramatically representing a Canadian folk hero. She hints at Edwards's drinking problem in a humorous way without making it a main issue. Ringwood was not, it should be remembered, attempting to make a realistic portrayal, but rather she aimed at using Edwards's eccentricities, humour and wit, to reflect on the community. She does, however, bring out both the sense of justice that was deeply rooted in the real Edwards and the fact that he was true to his convictions. The real Edwards was a compassionate man who would gladly give from his own

pocket to the needy; the incident with Mrs. Gudgeon is used to show his charity. Ringwood chooses to emphasize the positive side of his character rather than to include some of the incidents Edwards himself regretted and viewed as mistakes. The exploitive elements of the community surrounding Edwards are emphasized in The Jack and the Joker, serving to reinforce the positive values of the editor and also to cast light on the controversy surrounding him (the snobbishness and vanity of the ladies and Dudley Carp's corruption are instrumental in making the case).

Ringwood herself expressed her opinion about the plays she wrote for Gard's Alberta Project:

> Of the three plays, I like The Rainmaker best. It employs a large cast, seems to me to express the time and the people of the prairies, and the earth and the elements somehow inform the shape and the action of the play. Also, the language naturally took a poetic turn without seeming forced or artificial. The Rainmaker received the finest productions I have seen of any of my plays--one by Sydney Risk in Banff and one, directed by Tom Kerr with the Kamloops High School appearing in Victoria. (Anthony Stage Voices 95)

It is obvious that Ringwood thought less of The Jack and the Joker. It is likely that she recognized the inferiority of this play compared to the two that followed: it is, of the three, the slightest not only in length but also in achievement. Benson and Conolly, nevertheless, claim that the play "deserves much wider recognition than it has received"

(64). They find the play has a "satiric bite" and that it successfully exposes "the bigotry and small-mindedness of rural Alberta" (64-65). Yet compared to The Rainmaker and Stampede I find The Jack and the Joker inferior. Ringwood does not incorporate nearly as much "subtlety and wit" as she does in the other two. Its characters are clichés and, considering Bob Edwards's reputation, this should have been the play for wit and satire. Perhaps Ringwood was too eager to present a positive view of Edwards to provide a "true" one.

The Rainmaker (1944)[3] employs a cast of more than 30 people and makes extensive use of music, choral passages and choreographed movement. The structure is made up of impressionistic sketches which employ a number of people at all times. The stage, therefore, must be large; that requirement in turn demands a fair degree of choreography. The language is poetic and humorous.

Although this play also features an historical figure--Charles Hatfield, the rainmaker--the two main characters are the community of Medicine Hat and the drought-stricken land. Once again, Ringwood blends facts and fiction to suit her purposes. As Gard narrates the actual incident in his book Johnny Chinook, on 29 January 1921, Hatfield signed a contract to erect his precipitation towers between May and August that year in Medicine Hat, thereby intending to bring rain to the drought-stricken area. The American Hatfield had had tremendous success in the United States, and the rumour of it had travelled to Medicine Hat where the farmers, after years of failed crops, decided to place their bets on Hatfield. There is still dispute about how successful Hatfield was, but records tell that rain did come--on 2 May--during Hatfield's visit.

Unfortunately, it continued to rain very heavily and soon the farmers' fields were too muddy to plant a crop. The dry weather, however, came in June and continued until 25 July, when a good rain restored conditions and gave farmers an acceptable crop.

Ringwood presents Hatfield as a rather dubious man and leaves it up to the audience to decide whether or not he actually brought rain to Medicine Hat. She emphasizes the virtues of the prairie community through Sam, but the rest of the community is divided and troubled about the situation. Sam, a middle-aged musician, is the most singularly important character because he acts as both a unifying force and spokesman not only of the community but also, possibly, for the playwright. The prologue and epilogue are set in 1945 and provide the play's time frame, which connects it with the present (i.e. the time of writing). The prologue features Tom Arnold, a farmer, reminiscing about his late wife Marg, whose spirit appears as "a dim, quiet figure" (182) behind him with a soft dream-like voice, and about the day in May 1921, when Marg had decided to leave Tom, unable to endure any more hardships of prairie life. Tom has found a clipping about Hatfield that Marg kept and the clipping triggers the flashback of the events twenty-four years before. The stage is transformed, by light and sound effects, into a village fair on a street corner. Gradually the stage fills with the townspeople who gather to await the magic moment: Hatfield has promised to bring rain to their land before the end of the evening. Rain does come on that final night. For Marg, as for all the people, rain means renewed hope and thus she decides to stay with Tom. Marg and Tom, however, are not at the centre of the play--even Hatfield, who provided

the play with its title, only appears halfway through it. Ringwood emphasizes the people of the community (thus the extensive use of large crowds and the choral effect they produce).

The opening scene "has an air of strained gaiety based on an attempt to rise above despair" (183). The people move on to the stage to the sound of Sam's music, which continues to play throughout the scene. The comic and absurd element of the prairie condition is made a part of the introduction to the spirit of the community. Quite early in the play the absurd element is introduced to make it an integral part of the spirit Ringwood is trying to portray:

Tim: I remember it raining in this country once. Water come right down out of the sky.

Walt: You got to show me.

Tim: My brother plumb swooned away with the shock of that rain. Took us four hours to bring him to.

Walt: You don't say. Four hours.

Tim: We tried everything. Glass of water. Glass of wine. Whiskey. (To Joe) You know what finally revived him?

Joe: Couldn't guess.

Tim: Glass full of dust. Brought him right to. That was the stuff he was used to--only thing that could save him. (184)

The faces of the older members of the community are strained from years of hard work and despair, but the younger ones are gay, not yet burdened by the unpredictability of the life of farming. Two of the

younger boys express a fascination with water in their conversation with Joe, who claims to have seen the Atlantic ocean. Tom, too, has been hoping for a sign of rain, a change of weather that would make Marg change her mind and stay on the farm with him:

> Tom: ...I was so sure, I've been kind of light-hearted all week. But I guess it ain't that way. I guess if people have to depend on something outside, like rain, to keep them together, why they just aren't worth saving. Maybe there ain't anything, anybody caring about anyway. (191)

Tom and Marg, however, are reconciled and go home together when the rain finally comes. The land was at the root of Marg's discontent, and now that there is rain, there is new hope.

The play's various plots centre on the community's relation with the soil. Something of the austerity and darkness of the tragedies pervades some scenes. The impression is one of a last-ditch hope that is further weakened by the community's division; Sam, however, helps them to re-establish their faith in themselves. As dark and sinister as everything may look in the midst of the crisis while the people wait for the rain, so it is just as bright and hopeful when the rain comes and washes all despair away. Miranda, the fortune-teller at the fair, tells Hatfield just how much the people depend on him keeping his promise:

> Miranda: Folks here don't need a song to discourage them. Folks here are about to hit bottom. You're their last straw, Mr. Rainmaker, and they're

clinging to you. But they're losing their faith--in you, themselves, everything. It's slipping away from them, out of their faces and their hearts and their bones. It's drying up, like their crops, like dust. (189)

The contrast evoked by the words "clinging" and "slipping" in the above brings out the fragility of the people's condition. The emphasis on both body and mind being dependent on the soil, and therefore rain, is clearly brought out by the above citation. In the end, the crowd rejoices in the rain, and whether or not the citizens believe that Hatfield is entirely responsible for the rain, they make him the centre of their celebration. Sam and Jody, a young black boy, remain alone, reflecting upon the coming of the rain:

Jody: You see, I've been praying, Sam, praying every night for rain.

Sam: Why, Jody? You don't farm.

Jody: So's all the people I see could stop looking up at the sky and muttering. So's they wouldn't look so broken down.

Sam: I see.

Jody: Now I got to decide whether it's Hatfield or Him. Those towers look mighty imposing, Sam.

Sam: So do the Rocky Mountains, Jody, and they've been there a lot longer.

Jody: (<u>After a pause</u>) Guess you're right.

Sam: Maybe Hatfield's just lendin' a hand. Anyway, seems like a miracle--this rain. It sure does. (201)

The fact that Ringwood gave these important lines to a black character reflects on her concern with minorities, her desire to enhance the awareness of various ethnic groups in Alberta, and, one might speculate, an interest in the black which she further explored in Stampede with "Nigger" John Ware.

Sam is a constant figure on the stage, taking part in almost every conflict that appears. He is similar to the characters who appear under the name of Dowser in two of Ringwood's later plays, Widger's Way and Mirage. Denyse Lynde writes in her article on the Dowser characters in Ringwood's plays that the characters are often a common man of the people, humble and prophet-like: "He is a dreamer whose ability to see through the surface of life gives shape and focus to existence of those about him, especially those whose own dreams have been threatened by the prosaic texture of daily life" (Lynde 27). Throughout the play Sam is the one who helps out his fellow men and the one called upon to calm the crowd when it gets too angry and upset. He looks after Ed and Sarah's carnival booth so that they can go to listen to the band. Sam is also closely connected with the image of the umbrellas. A young girl, Cissy, goes to Sam with a basket filled with paper umbrellas that she is trying to sell in order to buy her father some tobacco. Sam buys nearly all of them, and thus helps Cissy fulfill her dream. Linked with the umbrellas, now belonging to Sam, is the sky. Sam understands and is in tune with the feelings that the prairie sky conveys: "That blue sky can make a man feel mighty powerless, can't it, Hatfield?" (188). The umbrellas, which Sam hands out to cheer up the crowd, become a symbol of laughter under dark skies at a time when the

the crowd is sinking into despair and frustration over the lack of rain. Sam reminds the community of their past struggles and how, in spite of everything, they managed to laugh their way through and maintain the hope of something better. The umbrellas, then, link Cissy's hope of fulfilling her dreams with the sense of hope that Sam passes on to the people through the umbrellas.

Sam's music and singing also have the effect of soothing and calming the crowd when it becomes unruly. The people have faith in Sam and share his belief in democracy: they direct their anger at Hatfield, but Sam insists that he too is entitled to his convictions and that they should hear him out. They are finally willing to listen to Hatfield when Sam gives the word to him. Everyone, except Weird Willy, the lamplighter, joins in the celebration when the rain comes. In Dark Harvest, Gerth was fighting an evil God, while Lisa and David had faith in God and their own dreams for the community. Sam's simple and hopeful attitude to the land and the community to which he belongs aligns him with Lisa and David, and contrasts him with Willy. When the rain comes Willy, who refers to Hatfield's line of work as Satan's work, curses his God for not punishing Hatfield along with the rest of the community, whom he calls sinners:

> Willie: (Irritated and annoyed with the Lord) You didn't do it. You didn't smite him down. There won't ever be another chance like that--those towers raised up, Hatfield on top, thunder and lightning and the people cheering down below. There won't be another chance like that in a

hundred years.

Sam: Now, Willie, a hundred years ain't long in the sight of the Lord.

Willie: It's too long for me, though. Listen to them out there singing in their pride--but pride falls, oh sinners, pride falls. (200)

Quite unlike Gerth, however, Willie is a comic figure and is looked upon by the community as a rather harmless and odd little man.

Of all the characters in The Rainmaker, Sam is the most fully developed, precisely because he embodies the community spirit. He participates, either in words or through his music, in all the "sketches" throughout the play. Although Hatfield is the historical figure and the character who provided the title, he is not a dominant figure. When he appears halfway through the play he is portrayed as a Yankee con man. His answers to the crowd's questions are comic rather than credible, yet he is a real, unsentimental and slightly ironic characterization of a typical rainmaker from the era of Rainmakers:

Hatfield: Rain? Of course it will rain. My solution has been a little static, but everything's all right I tell you.... It's bound to rain, Madame. Sooner or later it's bound to rain.... Believe in myself? My dear fellow, as Ben Franklin harnessed the lightning so Charles Hatfield can harness the rain fall. Science, dear fellow, pure science. (188)

In The Rainmaker the extensive use of music and large crowds (which

place the emphasis on the community and also achieve dramatic tension through the choral element) proved successful for Gwen Ringwood's comedies, especially in this play which does not depend on any one or two individual characters for dramatic coherence. The success of The Rainmaker as a folk comedy lies in Ringwood's strong portrayal, through a series of impressionistic sketches, of a prairie community's particular spirit. This spirit is far removed from that of the austere mood of her early prairie tragedies.

In her next play, the full-length Stampede, Ringwood incorporates several factual stories, not as in The Rainmaker, in a flowing, integrated way. The full-length structure allows this multiple plot. She continues, however, to celebrate the prairie community and the local folk heroes of Alberta. Stampede (1945),[4] like The Rainmaker, incorporates a large cast, the element of music, and historical figures--the legendary Alberta cowboy "Nigger" John Ware and the famous black bucking horse, Midnight.

John Ware was born in 1845 in South Carolina and died on 12 September 1905, twelve years before the Calgary Stampede began. For over three generations John Ware's relatives had been slaves, working in the cotton fields on the plantations in the South. But in 1880, John Ware made his way north to Canada and became a rancher and cowhand in the Canadian West. For 25 years he raised cattle in the Red Deer River Valley in Alberta. Like most slaves, John Ware had no education and could neither read nor write, but he quickly became famous for his muscular strength, his excellent horsemanship and the greatness and kindness of his heart. Ware died instantly when he was thrown off a

tame bucking horse, something that had never happened to him on a wild bucking horse. In 1940, a group of men gathered to form The John Ware society, to promote the preservation of the old western traditions. The society did not last long but those men "knew the story about the great coloured cowboy--the story of hardship overcome, his success as a rancher, his skill as a rider, the power of his muscles and the friendly nature which commanded hearts" (MacEwan, John Ware's Cow Country 256).

The other story that Ringwood uses in the play is the story of Midnight, the famous bucking horse (also narrated in Gard's Johnny Chinook). In the play she links Midnight with John Ware but in actual fact the two stories are separated by years: Midnight was born in 1915, ten years after Ware's death. But Ringwood combines them because the two legends bring out the qualities in each which she wishes to emphasize (both are proud, strong and exceptional). The owner of Midnight, Jim McNab having, returned from the First World War, knew instantly that he was the owner of the greatest bucking horse in the West. McNab was the only one who could ride Midnight, the only one he would not kick off; a special friendship grew between the two. McNab never himself broke the spirit of the horse, but could not resist entering Midnight in various local stampedes, although he feared that the riders' spurs would make an outlaw of the horse (meaning that the horse would refuse to bow to any man, even McNab himself). In 1924, McNab entered Midnight in the Calgary Stampede but almost immediately regretted doing so, for he could no longer ride Midnight and eventually sold him. Midnight became the greatest bucking horse in Canada, but his spirits had been broken and he became an "outlaw."

Unlike in The Rainmaker, Ringwood develops a few individual characters, all fictitious except Ware, around whom the plot revolves: Shorthorn, the American foreman of Bar XY and a well-respected man; John Ware, known as Nigger John, a faithful friend to Shorthorn; Shark, the villain who is envious of Shorthorn's leadership; Bud, a young, talented cowboy and Celia, his pretty fiancée. The other characters, such as the spectators at the Stampede, Ma Raybourne of the boarding house, the tenderfoot, Larry, from Toronto, and other cowboys driving cattle to Calgary for Shorthorn. These minor characters are stereotypes of the West, who sing the traditional cowboy songs, who have their own language and who share a common code of living.

The action revolves around the events leading up to the Calgary Stampede for which Shorthorn and his cowboys are heading when the play opens. The art of the rodeo at the Stampede and the relations among the cowboys that are established during the competition also serve as main events. The large cast and the interchange between indoor and outdoor settings of the three acts make for a challenging theatrical task.

When the play opens, the time is midsummer 1912 at "a camp site on the cattle trail leading north to Calgary" (207). It is a typical western cowboy scene: "A few scrub poplars, a small knoll at back, some shrubs and rocks, a camp fire, the bed rolls of several of the riders, their saddles, and the tongue and entrance or the rear entrance of the Chuck Wagon, comprise the 'furnishings' of the setting" (207). While Lonesome sings "Doney Gal" the stage gradually fills with cowboys. The good and the bad guys are clearly established from the beginning: Shark, the villain, is antagonistic toward Shorthorn and racist toward

Nigger John, whom he refuses to sit beside. The other cowboys are amiable fellows, teasing the innocent Larry in a friendly manner and expressing their disgust at Shark's behavior. The talk is of the upcoming Stampede in which the cowboys will be competing. These characters live by the code of the West established during the frontier years, a code that seems a mixture of both the American and the Canadian frontier stereotypes. The American element (as Dick Harrison defines it in his essay on "Cultural Insanity") is the crude, raw and uncivilized villain. The Canadian aspect is the ordered world which surrounds the characters. The tenderfoot Larry, for instance, knows that he can only be accepted by the cowboys if he learns the ways of the occupation (thus his exaggerated stereotypical speech). A code of behavior governing every aspect of life is founded on obedience to authority, a specifically Canadian characteristic.

There are, in effect, three main characters in Stampede: Shorthorn, Nigger John and the celebration of community through the event of the Stampede (community being a wider concept than just that represented by the Stampede). Ringwood strives to dramatize the values and dangers of the community spirit she finds characteristic of the prairie. The positive values are symbolized in Nigger John and his friendship with Shorthorn.

Nigger John is established as helper and supporter of goodness and justice, and the following conversation denotes other of his human qualities. He expresses his concern for the horses in the competition, a concern that goes beyond the physical treatment of the animals:

Slim: Stampede gives a man a chance to show what he can do.

Bud: Sure it does. He's up against the best.

Nigger John: Maybe. Still it seems a waste--raking a horse from head to flank, making an outlaw out of him, so's people can yell. (212)

The first act also reveals that Shorthorn is wanted for a murder committed more than twenty years ago in the States. He has been fleeing from his past (and the law) in hope that the years would erase his guilt and responsibility in the accident. He and Nigger John have plans to settle down to ranching on their own land after the Stampede, but the mean-spirited Shark catches up with Shorthorn's past and threatens to reveal the truth, thereby forcing Shorthorn to flee, leaving Nigger John and their plans behind.

The friendship between the two men is founded on mutual understanding and respect. Nigger John is the only one who has known about Shorthorn's past and he protects him, consoles him and puts his mind to rest on the matter:

Nigger John: Forget about it.

Shorthorn: (Looking at the scar on his arm) You do what you see to do at the time, that's all anybody can do.

Nigger John: Let it go, boy. It's way back there behind you where it don't matter no more. And you've paid for it. You're safe now. You hear me. (218)

The two men stand up for each other at all times. Shorthorn is also the only one who names Nigger John by his real name--John Ware--a sign of respect. The two men share an appreciation for the beauty of the land around them and the simple life they like to lead. The well-known

lyrical style of Ringwood's dialogue is evident in this passage:

> Shorthorn: ...Up there in the Porcupine we'll be free to go on the way we have been, raising cattle, herding them under our own brand, living the only way I ever want to live, close to the sky and the stars, knowing the wind and the way the herd beds down and the sound of an old bull bellowing his pain and his challenge out in the night. (218)

Ringwood creates Shorthorn's idiom with concrete particulars that stand for an entire way of life, metaphors ("close to the sky") that extend the spiritual significance of that life, and an empathy with the non-human (that old bull's "pain" and "challenge") that affirms a participation in a unified world. The simplicity and "absence of civilized sophistication" (Harrison, 285) that characterized the Garden Myth of early Canadian western fiction is evident in the natural imagery here.

Shorthorn exhibits other signs of natural virtues consistent with a garden myth. The paternal instinct in Shorthorn comes to the surface when he forbids an already injured Bud to compete in the Stampede on the notoriously wild horse, Midnight. Shorthorn loves Bud's fiancée, Celia, but realizes that she will be safer with Bud. Shorthorn takes Bud's place in the rodeo, literally a flirting with death, a passion with all the cowboys. Shorthorn then makes sure that Bud does not get hurt again and thus secures his and Celia's future. When Shorthorn is forced to flee, he hands his part of the ranch over to Bud. Shorthorn is the last

of the "real" cowboys of the old West and this lineage aligns him with the last of the old Indians, Indian Chief White Calf, who is being shown off to the passers-by by Beanie (a hint at the exploitive element of the community): "Last chance for a souvenir of the old West, folks--last chance..." (253). Beanie's comment is true of both Shorthorn and the Indian, and lends a tragic-romantic note to the ending.

Nigger John represents the community in Stampede (as Sam did in The Rainmaker), but he is more developed as a character and interacts dramatically much more than the other character. Nigger John is a helper and protector to those around him. He helps the young Larry on his way; he speaks up for Shorthorn and does everything in his power to keep Shark from forcing Shorthorn to leave; he nurses both the body and the soul of Lonesome after he gets drunk and loses all his savings, which would have fulfilled his dreams of going home; moreover, he tries to reason with Bud to make him understand why he must withdraw from the Stampede:

Bud: No. I can't see nothing, except that I ought to be in there fighting it out with Midnight.

Nigger John: You couldn't ride Midnight. Look at you, you're all stiffened up. You don't have a chance. You go sit down somewhere and think things over. There's a lot of things you don't know about yet. Looks like one of them might be loyalty. You might think about that a while. (247)

Just as Nigger John has been trying to save Shorthorn from having to flee, so he has unsuccessfully tried to protect Midnight from

destruction. Until Midnight was entered in the Stampede by his owner, Tilson, Nigger John was the only man who could ride the horse, but now even he cannot. He cared for the horse as if it was his own and the horse, like Shorthorn, trusted him:

> Nigger John: Yeah, he'll be famous, cause there's nothing can hurt him anymore. He's got a good clean hate inside him and he don't figure there's a man living he could carry on his back without lowering himself.
>
> Ma: If you could buy him from Tilson and keep him quiet for a while--
>
> Nigger John: Not now. From now on papers is the only part of Midnight anybody will own. You see he knows now what he was always afraid of, he knows that man's got a mean streak in him, a queer, twisted mean streak that likes to hurt, to turn the knife. They've made an outlaw of him and he is on his road. He'll be the greatest bucking horse that was ever born, but he won't trust anybody ever again. (231)

Nigger John's understanding and care for Midnight in the above bring out the other positive qualities in him. His perception of man and his greedy ways is unromantic.

The exploitive element in the community was explored in The Jack and the Joker in the useless land deal made by Dudley Carp. It emerges again here in Stampede with the Indian Chief, but more notably in the

Midnight motif. The horse as a symbol traditionally characterizes the wild, untamed and uncivilized aspect of the west. As can be seen throughout western American and western Canadian literature, man has taken it upon himself to tame the horse and eventually to alienate it from its natural surroundings. The abuse of Midnight is the strongest symbol used by the playwright to emphasize the exploitive, dangerous and negative side of the community. Nigger John, representing the virtues of the community, of course opposes and is saddened by it. By turning over to Bud his share of the ranch and partnership with Nigger John, Shorthorn gives the role of protector of dreams to Nigger John.

Nigger John is at the centre of the plot in Stampede, and Ringwood reinforces his function as regional folk hero by emphasizing the community surrounding the Stampede. Stampede attempts not only to bring to life the well loved character of "Nigger" John Ware but also to define the good and bad sides of community on the prairie. Ringwood's portrayal of the relations between the competing cowboys is one of good will in competition and comradeship. The celebration of the life of the cowboys emphasizes the appreciation of the simple life on the prairie shared by the people. These cowboys, and their way of life, have been born out of the land they live on, the Alberta prairie. Their language is simple, like their living, and unites them with the earth. There are no signs here of the theme that dominated Ringwood's early drama: an alienation from the land that interferes with human relation. Here instead is a celebration of the province of Alberta and its people, themes that continue to preoccupy Ringwood in the next group of plays from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. The three comedies just

discussed have little concern for women issues. The subject matter that Gard requested emphasized the regional history and folk heroes and thus disregarded the subject of women. However, Ringwood was later to emphasize the topic in her plays. The Courting of Marie Jenvrin, A Fine Coloured Easter Egg and Widger's Way are farcical comedies in which the playwright explores various immigrant communities in Alberta. Her treatment of women is particularly interesting here, as is her treatment of the history surrounding the particular communities.

IV. FARCICAL COMEDIES AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Ringwood has explored the history of the province of Alberta as well as the life of the pioneers who settled on the prairie. In the three farcical comedies that follow, she explores the immigrant communities in the West, and, also, in Widger's Way, she gives the old theme of the miser and his gold a Canadian setting. It becomes evident that Ringwood's positive vision of the prairie dominates as she continues to explore the comic mode and to mature as a dramatist.

Pure farce differs from comedy in that it concerns itself more with situation than with character. It is a light, short dramatic piece, not necessarily satirical, but humorous. Great latitude is allowed in the twists and turns the plot may take. The characters appear at times to be less than natural, but not necessarily unreal. Both The Courting of Marie Jenvrin and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg depict the characteristics of a certain community without individualizing the character types that appear in the plays. Widger's Way, on the other hand, is a comedy at times marked by a farcical action; it employs individualization of the most important character types such as Widger himself and Dowser Ringgo, the pedlar. All three plays are dominated by a sharp witty dialogue, comic human situations and a regional setting. The regionalism, however, is only used for the purpose of setting the background; the human situations are universal. Ringwood still leans on the theories and characteristics of folk drama that her first mentor, Koch, taught and emphasized. The Courting of Marie Jenvrin and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg share a focus on the ethnic element, and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg and Widger's Way share the concern for the community, providing a comic analysis and celebration of its values.

The Courting of Marie Jenvrin (1941)[1] grew from Ringwood's observations while living in Goldfields, northern Saskatchewan, in the early 1940s. Characters represent various ethnic immigrant groups among whom Ringwood was living at the time: Marie Jenvrin and Louis Hébert are French-Canadians; Mr. and Mrs. Wernecke are Ukrainians; Michael Lorrigan is an Irish hard rock miner; there are, too, the Catholic priest, Father LeBeau, and the greedy villain Mr. Dinsmore. The ethnicity in this play provides character colour. The conflict between the characters and the northern isolation is portrayed comically and none of the exaggerated farcical action of A Fine Coloured Easter Egg occurs. While the northern setting of this play might remove it from the category of prairie plays, The Courting of Marie Jenvrin exhibits similar concerns. Like the prairie plays, it explores a small, isolated ethnic community, the north serving merely as another plausible new setting (since the plot depends on isolation), not becoming a distinct character as the prairie becomes in the tragedies.

The play takes place in "the combined lunch room and sitting-room of the Beaverlodge Hotel in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories" (141). The interior is decorated with a few items that serve as evidence of the northern setting: a bear rug, a mounted caribou head and a parka. The proprietors of the hotel, the Werneckes, are minor characters but their human qualities add to the comic dialogue. Mr. Wernecke's interventions and stubbornness, coupled with Mrs. Wernecke's annoyance and impatience with him, not only characterize them, but add a fast-paced humorous dialogue to the opening scene. Each of the characters has his own style of speech. Marie Jenvrin is a young, pretty French-Canadian girl who works as maid in the hotel. She is known in the community for her excellent pies, but to make them perfect she needs cream. Marie is also

a very proud and outspoken girl and these traits get her in trouble. She is courted by young Louis, who is very naïve and persistent. But Marie has no intentions of marrying the young man. They share their French heritage, but otherwise their characters clash:

Marie: *Très bien*. If you must stay, you stay. But what if I tell you there is a whisper of love--just a small stirring--in my heart for someone else?

Louis: I will fight him.

Marie: *C'est impossible*. Besides, he does not love me.

Louis: Then he is a fool with no eyes. I can fight him.

Marie: He is twice as big as you. Anyway, perhaps I do not love him. Perhaps I hate him. *Mais, j'ai mal au coeur*, Louis.

Louis: (Solemnly) *Moi aussi*. We French suffer, Marie.

Marie: (With a big sigh) *Oui, nous souffrons*. (For a brief period these very young people suffer. Then Marie turns briskly back to her pie.) There, it is ready for the oven. See how beautiful, Louis.

Louis: You are wonderful. (146)

The above is a typical example of the style of the play, with its mixing of French and English, the simplicity of language and the characters' naïveté. The playful and impulsive qualities in Marie anticipate the coming trouble for her, but more importantly, they provoke laughter.

The witty Irishman, Michael Lorrigan, courts Marie in a less romantic way. He is constantly insulting her, but leaves her boxes of

chocolates as presents. Because of his insults about Marie's pies and her uncontrollable temper, Marie vows, in a fit of anger, to marry the man who will give her a cow so that she can make whipped cream. Mr. Dinsmore, the wealthy and unscrupuous villain, after paying $200 to have a cow flown in, proposes to Marie with a ring and a date for their wedding. Marie is terrified and must appeal to Michael to straighten out the horrible situation. He does so, nobly, and Marie and Michael join in marriage in the play's romantically resolved conclusion. Michael wins Marie's heart by spanking her for throwing water at him; moreover, he declares that he will not tolerate being pushed around, that he will be the man of the house. Ringwood was later to blush at this blatant male chauvinism. However, the division of the roles is eased a little so that, when the curtain falls, we are aware that Marie can use her feminine charm against Michael:

> Marie: Michael, if it would not be--if you don't mind--
> you see, the wood box--it is entirely empty.
> And it is so late, I thought--
>
> Michael: (Unaware of the web into which he has fallen)
> Sure, I'll fill it for you, Marie. No trouble
> at all....
>
> Marie: You will be a wonderful husband, Michael. (Her
> eyes are shining as she looks into the future)
> I know it! (162)

The fact that Ringwood, in The Courting of Marie Jenvrin, has been able to co-ordinate situation, setting and individualized speech in comic dialogue, is a sign of the writer's skill as a dramatist and her skill in expressing a human condition through dialogue alone.

In 1946, after Dr. John Ringwood had returned from the war, the

family moved to Lamont, Alberta, predominantly a French and Ukrainian settlement. The two years the Ringwoods spent there laid the ground for her first pure farce, The Drowning of Wasyl Nemitchuk or A Fine Coloured Easter Egg.[2] In this short one-act play, Ringwood successfully captures the particularities of the Ukrainian character and traditions symbolized by hand-made coloured Easter eggs. The ethnicity shapes both character and action as Ringwood relates her characters to the present (1950s) and the oil boom of 1946 in Alberta, which made many farmers contemplate the possibility of oil riches from their own property. The conflict arises between the old lifestyle and the new.

The farce is characterized by the audience's amusement over the situations that appear serious to the characters on stage. The playwright presents the brooding spirit of the Ukrainians as humorous without making fun of this particular side to their common heritage. The dialogue and speech pattern of the Canadian-Ukrainian people are "obtained by inflection rather than by heavy 'accent'" (225). This method leaves the play free of exaggeration and strain. The action, however, is physically exaggerated, particularly in passages where "horseplay" dominates. The time of action is a spring morning in the 1950s. The place is the yard and interior of George Litowsky's bachelor shack in the northern Alberta bush. The plot revolves around George's cousin Wasyl Nemitchuk, a farmer, and his wife Olga. The prospect of oil being found on their land turns their Ukrainian heritage and lifestyle upside down. Since the possibility of becoming rich has changed his wife, who now prefers chocolate eggs to the old hand-made ones, and the drilling noises are driving him crazy, Wasyl decides to leave. He disposes of his clothing by the river to make it seem as though he has drowned, and flees, wrapped in a blanket, to his cousin

George. This trick, of course, is intended to teach Olga a lesson. Here is Wasyl trying to explain the matter to George:

Wasyl: ...George, calamity falls on Wasyl Nemitchuk.

George: Yes? Too bad, Wasyl.

Wasyl: Yes. Terrible!

George: You're a good man too. I'm sorry.

Wasyl: Thank you.

(They brood).

George: Your house burned to the ground eh?--Tch--Tch.

Wasyl: (Indignantly) Who said anything about my house? It stands.

George: That is one blessing then. (Pause) Your daughters all ruined, is that it?

Wasyl: My daughters are respectable--all married!

George: Your hogs, then--stricken?

Wasyl: No! Two hundred and twenty beautiful white pigs I got.

George: Well, it's too bad, that's all, whatever it is.

Wasyl: Trouble, trouble, nobody knows--up--down. Crash--bang--day and night--up--down--bang--crash. In my brain!

George: (Thinking he understands at last) The doctor gives no hope?

Wasyl: Doctor?

George: About your brain? The noises in your head?

Wasyl: (Angry) What the devil are you talking about, George? The noises is not in my head. The noises is on my farm. The noises is Oil. Oil, George. (258-59)

This humorous passage typifies the dialogue in the play. It is short, fast-paced and bordering on silliness without ridiculing the Ukrainian "mood."

When Olga comes to look for Wasyl, George is ordered to tell her that Wasyl has drowned; instead, intending himself to win Olga's heart and the money, he tells her that Wasyl has run off with another woman. Wasyl reveals himself to Olga, and after they have reconciled, Olga brings news to Wasyl of the birth of his first grandson. It has been Wasyl's old sorrow not to have had a single boy in the family to take over the farm (a theme from the tragedies parodied here). It is also announced that there is no oil on Wasyl's property. So all is well in the end and Wasyl and Olga return to their farm. Wasyl still resists getting a house in the city, and explains why to Olga, who wants to be near the grandson:

> Wasyl: Never. A house in the city where two old people sit and holler on him. Don't touch the China dog, off the street, off the grass, away from the flowers. A life to drive the strongest grandson mad! No holidays, Olga. That way--no holidays!
>
> Olga: (Uncertainly) No holidays?
>
> Wasyl: I tell you how it must be. He must have a horse, a tractor, pigs. He must bring in the cows, help fix fence, run with the old dog barking across the pasture. He can hide in the hay stack, fish by the river. (268)

The attachment to the land in Ringwood's characters is ever present in her works, be it in tragedy, comedy or farce.

The characters of A Fine Coloured Easter Egg are not individualized,

but rather represent three different sides to the common Ukrainian character: Wasyl wants to preserve the old way of life and the rich traditions; George is easily tempted by the prospect of wealth; and Olga is torn between the two extremes, looking for a way to combine the two, but not giving up the traditions while still longing for a house in the city. Ringwood succeeds in incorporating the regional setting (the regional history of the oil boom) and in celebrating one of the largest immigrant communities in Alberta. She does so with great care and feeling for the Ukrainian way of life, emphasizing and celebrating the values of the traditional rural community.

The women in The Courting of Marie Jenvrin and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg are obedient and easily put in their "right" place by the male characters in the plays. Both the condition of women at the time in the communities portrayed, as well as Ringwood's own choice of priority of theme at the time could account for this characterization. However, these three comedies were not written from the point of view of women, but rather from that of the whole community. Olga is perhaps the one who comes closest to some of the characters in the later plays (in terms of rebelliousness) such as The Lodge (1976), featuring the strong and spirited Jasmine Daravalley, Mirage (1979) and Drum Song (1982). In these latter two plays, which will both be discussed in Chapter V, Ringwood consciously creates memorable female protagonists, who are a part of the land on which they live and who draw their inner strength from the earth and the communities to which they belong. Olga, for instance, is a comic figure and is not individualized to the point of the tragic female characters we will see later. The comic form, if

anything, restricts the individualiztion of the characters. The comic form was chosen for these plays because it best suited the positive and humorous view of the community.

Widger, in Widger's Way (1952),[3] is, like the Ukrainian characters, a product of his environment. Widger's Way does not, however, foreground ethnicity, as did the two previous plays. Rather, it depicts an Alberta mix of fossils, gold and typical farm toil, giving the play a local colour and regional emphasis in a somewhat different way than in the preceding two plays. Ringwood wrote this play in 1951 at the request of Studio Theatre at the University of Alberta. Professor Robert Orchard, who later directed the play, advised Ringwood to read The Pot of Gold, the classical comedy by Plautus, for inspiration (Anthony, Gwen Pharis Ringwood 88). Parts of the plot of Widger's Way are similar to Plautus' play. In The Pot of Gold an old man guards a treasure which he has found in his house. Like Widger, he acts suspiciously in his fear of losing the treasure. He does at one point lose it, but recovers it in the end, and the play ends with the marriage of his daughter and young Lyconides (whose uncle she was to have married). Plautus used Greek dramatic technique in creating a comedy for his own Roman audience. It is a comedy of errors (Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors was based on Plautus' Menaechimi), the first of its kind. The plot of comedy of errors emphasizes situation rather than character. The action revolves around a number of misadventures of characters--usually a set of twins--who are disguised and mistaken for somebody else. In Widger's Way, Jake is disguised as another person in order to get into the village and murder Planter. The moral point is

conveyed by Dowser Ringgo. In The Pot of Gold, Plautus created distinctly Roman characters with whom his audience could identify. Likewise, Ringwood took the Roman model for framework and went on to create distinctively Canadian characters for her Canadian audience.

In Widger's Way, Ringwood combines comedy with farce and melodrama in so far as the play is characterized by extravagant theatricality and a predominance of physical action. Characters, and plot and dialogue are comic. Dowser Ringgo and Widger himself have the occasional longer monologue when in philosophical reflection. Dowser also functions as the chorus. The play follows the traditional five scene division of classical drama. The action, apart from the first scene, takes place just outside Widger's house. The only stage properties are the fence dividing Widger's land from the church and Widger's well; only the windows, doors and steps of his house are visible. The stage is spacious, creating the effect of making Widger, when alone or with one other character on stage, seem small and weak, a physical reinforcement of the state of man in Ringwood's play.

Widger is an Albertan farmer who appears a product of that very province itself. The early 1950s provide the time; the story incorporates the most significant characteristics of the regional setting such as the hardships of farming the land, the oil boom of that era and the discovery of Pre-Cambrian Shield fossils. Besides Widger himself and Dowser Ringgo, the pedlar--the two most individualized characters--the others also reflect the various configurations of the regional setting: the exploiters Planter and his greedy mining partner Jake; Garrow, of the American oil-drilling team working on Widger's

property; Sokolander, the corrupt politician. Others include the town constable Docket and the two women: of these, Roselle is Widger's strong-willed daughter and the widow Anastasia is the stereotyped meddler and gossiper. Widger with his touchy individualism and self-reliance embodies one side of Albertan self-sufficiency to a fault. He says: "True, I've lived to myself. I don't lend things, discourage the children from tramping down my pasture, but neither have I borrowed anything or bothered anybody" (317). Widger's self-sufficiency puts the emphasis on the individual rather than on the community and is necessary at this point in the play in order to show his transformation later on. Dowser Ringgo represents a universal quality, the joy of life, which does not find expression in the community around him:

> Dowser: For Dowser Ringgo there's no calendar. He can declare it holiday when the sun shines or the fish are biting or a pretty woman narrows her eyes at him. I'm free, Widger, I go where I please, sleep in a hay stack, I drink a pint of ale when I'm in pocket and when I'm not I wander from place to place selling my wares. (309)

The play opens on a stormy night full of thunder and lightning. Widger is awakened by Planter, who is trying to escape the murderous Jake; he is after the gold that they have found and fought over. Planter has managed to win the bag of gold nuggets and the treasure map, and he now wants Widger to hide him. Widger has no choice, and when Jake arrives at the house, Widger is forced to lie and give him false directions to save Planter. Planter finally leaves, telling Widger to

guard the gold with his life until he returns for it. Widger contemplates keeping the gold for himself and hides it nervously in various places: in the well, in the bell tower of the Church, and in a sack of potatoes. Fear of losing the gold and of being discovered turns Widger into a nervous wreck. Jake returns to the village and kills Planter, but Widger is blamed for the murder. In the end, Officer Docket finally solves the murder and arrests Jake; the American oil company has struck oil on Widger's land and he becomes a wealthy man. In a resolution of the romantic conflicts of the play, Sokolander, who was to have married Roselle, marries Anastasia, while Roselle marries her true love Peter, a young geology student.

Subplots notwithstanding, Widger's way of life and the transformation he goes through bring forth the message Ringwood wishes to convey: the importance of community over the individual. Widger has kept to himself all his life and looked after his daughter Roselle. He has struggled like any other farmer to make a living from the soil. Here is Widger's perception of what his life has been like. Planter is teasing him about staying on as Widger's hired man:

> Widger: Hired man to Widger? (<u>He is shaken</u>) But of course you're joking. I'm not rich, you know. A poor farmer wrestling with poor land to get the meanest living. Cutworms and taxes, drought and early frost, hail-storms, grasshoppers, potato blight...Why sir, you've no idea how nature contrives to keep a man's nose hugged to the grindstone. I work from dawn to dusk. At

> the grindstone. I work from dawn to dusk. At night, I dream of dying in the poor-house. When I get up, what do I find? A hawk has killed my chickens. The old sow's devoured all her litter, bugs ravished the potatoes and the bull's been struck by lightning. That's how it goes with Widger. I couldn't afford you, sir. Besides it's very dull here. You wouldn't like it. (291)

This passage, because it parodies all the typical prairie struggles dramatized in her earlier plays, indicates a development on the part of the playwright. In Still Stands the House, Ringwood was absorbed by the austerity and tragic element of the struggle, but in Widger's Way she has reached a different understanding. Through her work on the comedies based on regional folk history, to these farcical comedies, Ringwood was able to free herself from the tragic form. Community rather than the individual takes precedence as comedy for Ringwood becomes associated with themes of social and familial responsibility.

Widger is, at the beginning, unable to express his love for his daughter. He is merely interested in marrying her off to Sokolander, the rich, middle-aged politician, and in keeping the sack of gold for himself. Even when Planter is found dead, and innocent Widger is suspected of the crime, he is too greedy to give up the gold. Eventually he does, but by that time he is a changed man. Widger's Way is also entitled The Face of the Mirror; what Widger sees in the mirror is not only his own, but the whole community's greed, fear and material

ambitions. In the confrontation with the murderous Jake, Widger shamefully admits to his faults:

Jake: You kept the gold, hid all trace of Planter, lied, threw blame on others.

Widger: (Ashamed) I know. (He looks menacingly at Jake) Your face--it's cruel and greedy!

Jake: Don't tell me you've not seen cruelty or greed before.

Widger: I've seen them on other faces, yes--

Jake: Where else, Widger?

Widger: (Deeply ashamed) I've seen them in the mirror-- looking at me, out of my own eyes. (239)

Although Widger becomes a wealthy man in the end, he is still the small, comic and cautious man he always was. But he has in the course of the play risked his life for his daughter Roselle; in the process, he has painfully confronted the less attractive sides of his own character. To Ringwood, "Widger somehow seemed an interesting and very Canadian character" (Anthony, Stage Voices 96), a character who gives with one hand and takes back with the other, fearful of commitments to other people, cautious and nagging. In a moment of self-recognition after he is arrested by Constable Docket, Widger wonders at his own greed for the gold, how he has shrunk and how the world has changed: "...And yet for all my care, at his own time, the Giant closes his fist on Widger. Since it's so, I'd wish myself a bigger fistful" (326). For his self-recognition Widger is a bigger fistful in the end. When he rushes into the darkness of the night in an attempt to find his daughter, who has

Widger's self-recognition points to the importance of community over the individual.

Roselle is a much more fully rounded female character than Marie Jenvrin and Olga Nemitchuk in the previous two plays, but by no means is she a strong character. Roselle has been taking care of her father in a kind and obedient manner. She loves Sokolander's nephew, Peter, who only has eyes for the fossils he has found on Widger's land. Out of spite, Roselle agrees to marry Sokolander but soon regrets this decision. She goes to Dowser for help and he agrees to let her hide at his sister's house on the night of the wedding. Eventually she and Peter marry with Widger's blessing. Roselle remains a very feminine character, but nevertheless shows signs of a will and a mind of her own. Like Dowser, she is in tune with her natural surroundings, however romantically, and greets the sun, meadow larks, trees and frogs good morning. She knows when Dowser, nature's man, will return and she knows which signs to look for: "Dowser! Dowser Ringgo! I'm glad you've come. You're late this year. I've watched for you since the first ducks flew North" (308).

The human qualities of Sam in The Rainmaker and Nigger John in Stampede are again incorporated in this play's Dowser character. Dowser Ringgo is a water-witcher and a pedlar. He is the one who, in the end, makes it possible for all things to come to a happy ending. In Dowser's lines, Ringwood's colourful, naturalistic and poetic imagery and language are given full force. Dowser protects and helps his fellow men to a better life, and does so out of kindness and understanding. Dowser tries, but with no luck at the time, to reason with Widger, not to force

tries, but with no luck at the time, to reason with Widger, not to force Roselle to marry Sokolander. In order to protect Roselle, who turns to Dowser for help, he takes her to hide until the wedding is called off. Widger, who has been less than friendly to Dowser, also turns to him in desperate need of help when he is accused of murder and the entire community believes him guilty. As the following passage demonstrates, the essence of the Dowser character, who is also given the moral force of the Greek chorus in this comedy, is masterfully presented by the playwright:

> Dowser: All--there you have it. Here's a poor man, over sixty, a farmer with a daughter, pays taxes, votes a respectable party and was baptized. That's all you know.
>
> Widger: Oh, no! (It is a cry) There's more. There's much more.
>
> Dowser: (Fast) Yes, there's the fear and the malice and the envy. The prickling conscience and the greed, and the skeleton in the respectable closet. The little hurts to pride, the desire to know things, and the desire to own. The urge to get on and the fear of death. (Widger looks at Dowser) And there's the will--the thin bright spire of a man's will thrust forth from the encircling cave. (Gently) There's love and the need for loving. (319-20)

Dowser is Ringwood's spokesman, so to speak, for the comments she wishes

to dramatize. Dowser reveals the good and bad of mankind and gives people courage to continue life in spite of their faults. He reflects the land on which he lives. As well, he makes possible the celebration of marriage, a celebration in which the whole community takes part. The emphasis on community is clinched by the marriage which provides the romantic as well as conventionally comic ending to the play.

Widger's Way is Ringwood's comment on and perception of Alberta's farming communities, the land around the people which has bred these basic human charactistics in them, and the particular spirit they possess. The dialogue is witty and gently satiric, and the action is rapid with movement. The audience's heart is with Widger as he struggles with his own greed, and with the gentle Dowser and Roselle. However, in Ringwood's own words, the play is "a bit lumpy" (Anthony, Stage Voices 96). The theme of the play is too often pushed to the background by the numerous subplots, exhibiting one of the problems in sustaining farce or comedy over a three-act play. The strength of the play lies in the way in which Ringwood's handling of comic form and dialogue create a very Canadian and yet universal character. The audience can recognize the human weaknesses in Widger while being amused by them. Benson and Conolly's only criticism of Widger's Way is of the "sentimental conclusion" to a play which otherwise matches Tom Stoppard in its celebration of "the irrational, the illogical, and the absurd" (Benson and Conolly 65). W.L. Keith, calling the play a "fantasy," regards it as "Ringwood's finest achievement" (Keith 183). It is safe to assume that the "sentimental conclusion" was deliberate since the play operates in the tradition of classical comedy, not modernist

absurdity. Keith's criticism comments more on the inadequacies of the Canadian dramatic critics in recognizing this play than on the play itself. Indeed, this is one of Ringwood's better plays, but its "lumpiness" is caused by weak characterization and busy plots. Ringwood had encountered this problem before. In Dark Harvest, she worked on the turgid language in the revised version, but did not tighten the plot. Stampede is another long play which could have benefitted from more strong characterization and less plot. Widger's Way is a more complex play because it refuses to idealize its central prairie character. The positive view of the prairie in Stampede was pursued via the garden myth, but in Widger's Way, Widger must grow to self-recognition on his own. He will never become as virtuous as a great John Ware.

Although Ringwood took to the comic form of drama in her exploration of prairie communities, and mastered it well in the short play, she was, in later years, to return to what can be called tragic musical drama. She had experimented with music in The Rainmaker and Stampede, and with the folklore and regional characteristics of Alberta in those two plays and in The Jack and the Joker, A Fine Coloured Easter Egg and Widger's Way. In the 1950s and 1960s, she went on to write musicals such as The Wall, Look Behind You, Neighbour and The Road Runs North. Through the writing of the plays discussed up until this point, she developed a positive vision of the prairie, its people and communities. Her positive perception of the prairie and isolated communities is still present in Mirage (1979). This is also a play considerably enriched by her British Columbian writing, specifically the Indian themes of the

trilogy Drum Song.

Ringwood's move from the prairie to the British Columbia interior in 1953 is significant for her development as a playwright; as a regionalist she was equally sensitive to her new surroundings and now drew on these for the subject matter of her plays. The Indians' way of life, their spiritual connection with the land and their conflict with the white man were consequently subjects that preoccupied her during the years she lived there. The three parts of the trilogy comprising Drum Song (1982) were written almost ten years apart.[4] ("Maya" [1959], "The Stranger" [1971] and "The Furies" [1981]). In between the second and third of these Ringwood returned to the prairie theme and setting of her earlier plays with Mirage. The strong Indian motif of the latter (a new feature in the prairie plays and a consequence of the B.C. move), and the theme of organic relationship with the land (that Ringwood had been developing in her prairie plays since Still Stands the House) link Drum Song and Mirage thematically.

Ringwood turns to the tragic form when she centres upon individualized characterization. Overall, her treatment of Indian themes shows a certain parallel to her treatment of the prairie. The tragedy of Drum Song is analogous to the early prairie tragedies, with the notable difference that the female protagonists take on a striking new independence of mind. While she writes no Indian folk comedy, she does hint at a comic ending in Mirage with the marriage between white and Indian. Mirage is a tribute to the farming community of Saskatchewan, featuring seventy years in the life of one white and one

Indian family. Here Ringwood confidently creates strong female characters; moreover, for the first time, she writes seriously about politics, history and social problems.

In Drum Song and Mirage, to be discussed consecutively in the following and final chapter, she has reached the climax of her skills, as both dramatist and playwright, coming to the end of her search for the most fitting form of her definition of the Canadian spirit. She is still preoccupied with the land and the people's spiritual connection with it, but unlike her work in the late 1930s, she explores the organic rather than confrontational relationship with it and has her characters cherish the land rather than fight against it. They draw their strength from the land. Her imagery is mythical, full and rich, and underlines the cyclical rhythm of nature. Because the two plays are connected in these imortant ways and becasue their development at certain stages is chronologically intertwined, I have chosen to discuss Drum Song first, even though the last play in the trilogy was completed two years after Mirage. Another important point in this regard is the trilogy as a whole. While it would be possible to discuss "Maya" and "The Stranger" in the contexts of their specific times of writing, I prefer to analyze the work as a whole before commenting on its relationship to Ringwood's final prairie play.

V. TRAGIC MUSICAL DRAMA

Drum Song: An Indian Trilogy[1] is Ringwood's tribute to western Canada's native Indians. Anton Wagner notes in his article on Ringwood, that "except for...One Man's House of 1938...there is little consious awareness in Ringwood's plays until the 1950s of the role of the dramatist as a social critic" (Wagner 6). But in the 1950s with her musicals, Ringwood started to change her focus. Social injustice or social problems do not dominate her plays, but they now have a more significant place in them. Drum Song focuses on the suffering inflicted by individual men, representing white society, on Indian women. These women are not fighting for the rights of women in general, but are primarily concerned with their own private revenge. In his article on plays about the Indian in North America, Peter Szaffko points out that Drum Song belongs to the group of plays

> ...with a native perspective, i.e., dramatic pieces in which the main emphasis is laid upon the present state of the Indian and where the conflict nearly always derives from the fact that people of the two cultures--Indian and non-Indian--are incapable of understanding each other. The native perspective refers to the writer's deep knowledge, understanding and relatively objective presentation of Indian reality together with its inner and outer conflicts and problems. (Szaffko 183)

Ringwood's interest in and compassion for the native Indians goes back to the late 1920s, when she worked as a bookkeeper on a Blackfoot Indian

reservation in Montana. In the early 1950s, when the Ringwoods moved to Williams Lake, she also worked closely with the Chilcotin and Shuswap Indians, the tribes characterized in the trilogy.

The three individual plays in the trilogy did not come together until 1981-2, and appear in effect as three individual pieces of three particular periods. Consequently, three different focuses emerge and a thematic progression is also evident. The choral parts and the last part, "The Furies," belong to the post-Mirage work but will, for the sake of the argument, be seen as part of the whole. Drum Song has the themes of a classical tragedy. It is enveloped in a musical and poetic language in the form of Alphonse's and the Chorus's starting and finishing each of the three parts. This provides the trilogy with the characteristics of the native Indians' language, their sense of a natural continuity, spirit and religion as an appropriate framework. "Maya" (1959) emphasizes the clash of the two cultures more than "The Stranger" (1971) and "The Furies" (1981) do; they centre more on the spiritual and emotional lives of the women portrayed. Not only structurally but stylistically the trilogy is tied together by the prologue and by Alphonse and the Chorus, establishing the tone and language of the three parts while also commenting on the action.

The prologue to the trilogy (and to "Maya") uses the imagery belonging to the old endangered ways. It speaks of the changing seasons, but more importantly the chorus' words give us the paradox in Indian mythology of birth and death as one cyclical force. It also foreshadows the action of all three parts:

Chorus: Speak of the great leaping salmon
Fighting the fall and the current,
Fighting the way from the sea-way
Back to the place of its spawning,
Back for the birth and the dying.

Alphonse: Speak, drum, the voice of my people.
Speak of this day and its dying. (337)

Words such as "fighting," "birth," "dying" and "old ways" are repeated throughout the speeches of Alphonse and the Chorus. They also anticipate the action of the play that follows.

The first scene in "Maya" represents the old ways through Josephina and Martha, two old Shuswap women. Josephina is Maya's grandmother, and although she has forgotten the old stories, ritual dances and domestic rituals, she still holds to the ancient beliefs of the native people:

Josephina: You know, Martha, on the morning Maya's boy died,
a whiskey-jack flew round the fire here three
times, crying as he flew. Always my grandmother
said that was a sign of death.

Martha: (Solemnly) The old ones were not fools.

Josephina: And the night before he died, a black
lizard crossed my path and went under the old
church. That too is bad sign. (339)

Josephina herself is divided between the old ways and Roman Catholicism, to which she has been converted. She does, however, seem to have found a way to live with both. The white man's influence on the Indian people

is thus evident before Maya, the female protagonist, comes on stage.

From the conversation between these two old women we learn a number of things: Maya, it seems, spends her time in the city, and later we realize that she earns her money through prostitution. She was the only Indian on the reserve to finish high school and now she is being offered a grant to go to university. Mrs. Roland, the agency worker, is presented as a rather pleasant person, fully aware that she is offering Maya a future in the white society that would alienate her from her own people. Failing to see how this may save Maya from further destruction, Josephina strongly objects to the offer because Maya is the only one left to look after her. We also learn that Maya had taken to the streets only after her son died. Furthermore, we are told that Maya's own father was white. This information indicates one of the themes in the trilogy--mixed marriage--and the father of her son is white too. All these facts are revealed to us before we are introduced to Maya, and when we are, we are not surprised to see her drunk and on the verge of despair.

In this character, Ringwood has given a language to the frustration and anger of Indians like Maya. A sharp-witted, hardened and honest woman, she is being destroyed not only by white society, but also by white men. The theme of the white man as destroyer touches all the female protagonists in the trilogy. Maya is crudely gay, but underneath the mask she is torn and broken. She has no identity, and although she knows that she wants to belong to the Indian culture, she also knows that she cannot, because it, like her, is being torn by the encroaching

white society. She has nothing left to give to a new life with Gilbert, her Indian lover, because what she had went to her lover, Allan, who threw it away and married a white woman. She rages against the Roman Catholic Church to which her grandmother and Martha have turned. Maya calls it "some white man's prayer" and refuses to let that be her destiny:

> Maya: ...Shall I bleed not or wait till after? Take my harmonica and dream at night of the songs I almost heard, sing of how deep the frost lies on the golden heart while Time, the ape, sits grinning at the wheel. Do you know what that means--nothing, like your Latin, Grandma! Me, I'm an Indian. (346)

As a woman, Maya has lost a child and the man she loved; on the streets, through alcohol and sex, she has lost her self-respect. She had a rich promise of a future with Allan, but he failed her for a white woman. So Maya has been deserted by the white male, and is in fatal conflict with the white society as well as her own heritage. There is hope, however, in the possibility for Maya to accept the grant to go to university.

In the final scene Maya exerts violence, and in an act of desperation and helplessness, she fatally wounds Gilbert to prevent him from killing Allan. Although Allan and what he represents made her "an empty room, despoiled by any passing stranger, gutted of hope and faith and desolate of love--the refuge of the lost, the lonely and the hungry" (349), Gilbert dies.

The intervention of the white society and culture is a destructive force in Maya's life. She renounces the offer of an education that could have saved her, because it would take her away from her own people, a feeble attempt to hang on to something that is being crushed along with her own identity. In the confrontation with Allan, Gilbert expresses his hatred of the whites, the oppression and humiliation inflicted on all of them. His anger is directed personally at Allan when he accuses him of having destroyed Maya. Gilbert is trying to kill Allan in an attempt to pay back the whites and also out of fear of losing Maya. Both their attempts to claim their Indian heritage are ultimately destructive. On a personal and domestic level, the death of her child and the loss of marriage with Allan destroy her. Maya's relationship with Josephina, who represents the last generation belonging to the old way of life, has lessened in strength in the end, although Maya presumably has drawn her strengths from her as Indian prior to the death of her child. As mother, wife and above all woman, Maya is deserted. In "Maya," Ringwood explores a social conflict between the Indian culture and the white man's society which controls it. Maya's tragedy, founded in the structure and the value system in power, allows her neither to be Indian nor woman. Compared to the two other plays in the trilogy, "Maya" emphasizes the conflict between the exploited and the exploiter. All the Indians in Maya are victims and consequently their spiritual inheritance struggles to survive.

The framework for "The Stranger," part two of the trilogy, derives from Euripedes' Medea (and again the chorus is used to comment on the

action). The setting is the 1970s on a Shuswap Indian reserve into which Jana makes her entrance, accompanied by her aunt Seraphina and an old man, Alphonse. She has left her own tribe behind in order to be with Jason, the father of her child and a white foreman on the ranch. A Chilcotin, she is regarded as "the stranger" among the Shuswap Indians, to them a harbinger of bad luck after the ranchworker Harry Peter is killed in the process of castrating Jana's fine young stallion. This act on behalf of the Shuswap Indians signifies their loss, through their dependence on the white man, of their native pride. Jana soon learns that Jason is going to marry the white ranch-woman and wants to raise their (i.e. Jana's) son in a white community. Thus Jana, like Maya, is deserted. But unlike Maya, Jana is filled with hatred and thirst for revenge. She sets her mind on acting out the curse she puts on Jason, in the end murdering the ranch-woman, killing the baby and herself, and consequently haunting Jason with the horror for the rest of his life. Jana's solution lies in the revenge and not in the security, offered her by William, a young ranch-worker.

The style is metaphorical and musical, and the language rich in symbolism. The images used by Alphonse and the Chorus at the opening of the play warn of impending violence. Words such as "darkness," "thunder," "shudder," "dying," "blood," "screaming," "lonely" and "quivers" (352-53) foreshadow the tragic events. Ringwood makes use of the chorus and the drumming with intensified speed whenever the tension builds, using the images of the opening "song."

The emphasis on Jana's spiritual qualities and the Indian rituals and beliefs form the background against which all the action takes place, and all the action is judged by those qualities, rituals and beliefs. In "Maya" Josephina told of the whiskey-jack flying around the fire as an omen of death. In "The Stranger," Seraphina speaks of the old omens:

> Seraphina: We should go home. As I come from the river, an owl speaks to me, speaks in our language. That means death. Someone will die before the moon rises. (353)

By drawing attention to the natural image, Ringwood not only incorporates it into characterization, but she lends it a dramatic legitimacy: death does indeed ensue in both "Maya" and "The Stranger."

As in "Maya," parts of the personality of the female protagonist are introduced before Jana appears on stage. Seraphina's and Alphonse's conversation reveals that Jana is a proud woman, and when William reports the death of Harry Peter, for which Jana is blamed, she is linked with the darker forces of the Indian mythology. Seraphina is afraid to tell Jana about the gelding of her stallion; she fears what Jana will do, knowing that Jana is capable of violence. Jana embodies both the light and the dark side of woman. She is a proud, strong, passionate woman who has given birth to a child, but also a woman who could easily kill.

Before the confrontation scene between Jason and Jana, Alphonse and the Chorus fill the stage from all directions with drumming and words of

death as the light changes "and the leaves make strange patterns on the clearing" (356). These have an intensifying effect as we approach the fatal meeting between the young people. Jason's character is revealed to us through his conversation with Alphonse before Jana enters for the first time. Jason, the man to whom Jana has offered both body and soul, turns out to be unworthy of her love. He is irritable towards Alphonse knowing that Alphonse is aware of his behaviour towards Jana. Jason is hungry for the land which will bring him power and will marry the ranch-woman, Barbara (named only by Jason), to get it. After the truth of Jason's doings, while away from Jana, has been revealed to her, Jana slowly perceives the horror of Jason's desertion:

> Jana: (Dazed) So all the years go down. I left my father's place and lived with you. Your wife. I followed you here and made this place clean...a place that stank with vermin. And I got no friendly word because I was a stranger, but I didn't care because you would come and we would be together. Now I don't know what happens to me. What happens to my child. (361)

Jason reveals a white male chauvinism by unfeelingly replying that their child is his son and that in order to receive the best (white) upbringing he must be with his father. Jason ignorantly and perversely believes that the hurt he has inflicted on Jana can be healed by money. In the speech that follows, one of the most powerful in the trilogy, Jana has gained control of herself and verbalizes the floods of hate and rage:

> Jana: Sure. You will pay money so your son grows up

Jana: Sure. You will pay money so your son grows up on the edge of the world. You will buy your own son. You think to pay me off as if I were a whore. For you my name was made ugly in the mouths of my people. For you, I groaned with birth pain. For you I came to this place where they spit on me as a stranger. Go now, Jason. Get out of here. Tell your white whore I'll send our child so she can look at him and know she'll never give you such a son. Tell her I curse the seed you spill from this day on. Tell her I wish your children born blind and hideous and twisted with hate as I am now. I hate you, Jason. (362)

Jana's feminine qualities have been abused and devalued; in the midst of the hatred and the rage, humiliation and degradation take their place. Jana does not succomb to the humiliation, but instead decides to carry out the curse she puts on Jason, so that he will know pain and suffering equal to those he has caused her.

The scene in which William offers Jana a life with him after Jason, an offer that can never provide Jana's solution, is dramatically tense. the Chorus and Alphonse are again brought on stage speaking and drumming of the deed in the making; of blood and screaming and darkness. The drumming persists through much of the rest of the play, accompanied by rolls of thunder and "darkness as before a storm." These theatrical devices all serve to intensify the sense of danger and destruction.

Jason prevents the Shuswap from burning Jana and her child out of the cabin. This prevention is an ironic act since it allows Jana to avenge herself on Jason and the white woman. Jana poisons and consequently kills the white woman. The killing that follows has the aura almost of ritual with Jana in her Indian garments and long loose hair ("She is Indian in the old way" [369]). The imagery Jana uses to describe her pain is natural imagery:

Jana: ...A flower lies bruised under your feet
Or a wild tree, ripped from its roots,
Will die and make no sound,
But flesh and blood cry out! (369)

In front of Jason, Jana stabs her child to death, the most cruel act for a woman to perform. But by killing herself, Jana joins her child in death, relieved of the suffering and the pain which Jason now carries as his life's burden.

In Jana, Ringwood has created a memorable and moving portrayal of a spirited woman. In drawing on natural imagery and specifically feminine qualities, Ringwood emphasizes the female aspect of her character more than in "Maya." Jana, unlike Maya, refuses to be a victim. She has the strength to refuse because she is fully committed to traditional Indian values. Her identity remains intact. Ringwood herself said this about "The Stranger":

> "The Stranger" is not a realistic play but a sort of poetic realism, I suppose. And maybe I was much closer all the way through to Indian speech and rhythms than I was in "Maya" particularly in the main characters.... Once more I did not want to write a documentary about

> white people's treatment of Indians but rather a tragedy of a truly fine and spirited woman who happened to be Indian, who had suffered betrayal and had failed to make a bridge between the two worlds. (quoted in Anthony, Gwen Pharis Ringwood 117)

Perhaps she was closer to creating distinctively male and female characters than she had been before (in the comedies, for example). Most certainly the pain that only women can suffer is also the issue in the last part of the trilogy, "The Furies," which indicates a concern for women issues that Ringwood hitherto had not made explicit. In "The Furies" the female protagonist, Selina takes her revenge on the men who raped and killed Lucy, her foster granddaughter. In her youth, Selina herself was, as were her friends, betrayed by the white man, Jacques La Range. Selina was pregnant by him (she too lost her child) and, like her friends, was promised a romantic life by him. All except Selina decided to take their revenge by hanging themselves. The sight of them is said to have haunted him to madness until he killed himself.

The action is as violent as in the two other parts, but here the violence takes place off stage. "The Furies," moreover, differs in another way, in that the main event takes place seventy years in the past. The use of history in this last part not only suggests a progression through time in the entire trilogy but also serves to illustrate that conditions for the Indian women are much the same in the present as they were seventy years before. Now old, Selina tells her two friends Celestine and Martha about the incident of the hanging and makes them swear to tell her story to their people so that it may be

handed down from generation to generation. Too afraid to join the others in the collective suicide as a young girl, Selina has never vented the anger and hate provoked by La Range's desertion of her. Now, in the present, she takes her own revenge as well as Lucy's by having the murderers of her foster granddaughter gelded, depriving them of what made them men and gave them the power to humiliate young Lucy. In "The Furies" (1981), written two years after Mirage, the revenge motif predominates. As opposed to Maya in "Maya," the women in this play come closer to the old ways and spirits of the Indian culture; the power of their lives is in their own hands.

Like "The Stranger," "The Furies" is rich with the imagery belonging to the Indian way of life; the fir tree, for example, is believed to be guarded by good spirits, as it was the only tree not to be struck by lightning. Selina herself is another of Ringwood's strong, spirited women, who suffered destruction and degradation because she was a woman. Selina is close to the spirits of Indian mythology and lives by the laws of "the old way," at one with nature. She is thought by the fearful Martha to "leave her body and mingle with the spirits" (372).

Selina is introduced through Martha and Celestine's conversation; when Selina appears on stage, her speech about the doll carries the action into the past:

> Selina: ...Seventy years ago and I was young, young and alive as Lucy was before she left me. Our bloody tribute to the moon came on me at thirteen. Soon after I ran to a lover's arms, heedless of tomorrow. The old women's warnings

> fell on deaf ears as I ran with a high heart in that sweet, short summer. I burned with a woman's longing but I was still child enough to delight in the doll he gave me...this.... (374).

Jacques La Range's gift to Selina provides an appropriate symbol of what she was to him. Selina's smashing of the doll's face symbolizes the pain and destruction inflicted on her life by the white man and also the violence and humiliation of Lucy's fate.

In the story of the past the young women are shamed by their people for their actions with the white man. "It is our people's way to choose death before shame" (378), as Anne Marie says, but they hang themselves to curse La Range: "Remember us forever as we hang here, warning betrayal, crying against false words and promises. We'll live as long as the memory of our people lives" (379). Through their deaths, they are released from the shame and from living; they receive the sweetness of vengeance knowing that they will haunt him until he is "afraid to go to sleep because of mocking dreams. He can flee across the world but his bad dreams will follow him" (378). The image of the gelding or castration links this part particularly with "The Stranger." Lucy's murderers are deprived of the pride and hope, and thus gelding becomes a symbol of the denial of the future, of life.

All three parts of the trilogy contain powerful imagery, metaphorical dialogue and explorative theatrical devices (such as sound effects and music). The three parts are linked by certain themes: the betrayal of the Indian women by the white man; the interference by the white man's culture with the Indian way of life as a destructive force.

white man's culture with the Indian way of life as a destructive force; and, more important, the celebration of Indian women, their strengths and pride.

The theme of the Indian trilogy (man's spiritual connection with the land and the celebration of women) are picked up again in Mirage. In this play, however, we see for the first time, a fusion not only of the white people and the Indian but also of the two people's ways of connecting with the earth. Mirage spans 70 years. Sounds and music provide transition between scenes and historical events: the sound of the wind is used to symbolize the prairie; drum music is used for the scenes of the two World Wars; and lyrical songs pervade the play. The large cast also works as a Chorus and mime is used rather than stage props. The use of music, sounds and mime and the division of the play into two acts with short scenes against the backdrop of history, are reminiscent of the style of epic documentary theatre associated with Theatre Passe Muraille in Western Canada. Ringwood combines this relatively new form (i.e. new for her) of theatre with her characteristic lyric and poetic language. In Mirage,[2] the playwright traces the lives of the Ryland family and the native Indian family, the White Calfs, from 1910 to the present day (i.e. 1980). It is set in southern Saskatchewan and celebrates the farming community on the prairie through 70 years of the history of that province. It depicts the social and political events of those years, and how they shape and affect the characters and their relation with the land. Ringwood fully develops the Dowser figure in Mirage. Dowser Ringgo, the diviner, speaks the prologue and the epilogue, and remains a separate part of the

narrative. As a prophet-like figure, Dowser follows all three generations of the Rylands and the White Calfs. Closest to the land, he has profound understanding of the prairie. He recognizes that without these ancient spirits and nature man remains "forever homeless" (490). This understanding makes the Dowser figure Ringwood's way of creating a character who is white but has the qualities of an Indian.

The similar settings of Act I, scene 1 and Act II, scene 7, tie the play together. Scene 1, set in 1980, presents the modern day Hilt Ryland, grandson of John Ryland. He is trying to find out whether he should accept his father, Ryan Ryland's offer of taking over the family farm or go North to a mining job. Jeanne White Calf, the granddaughter of White Calf and namesake of Jeanne Ryland, represents the Indians, now alienated even from their own language because of the Whites. Each has his separate worries. Hilt takes pride in the Rylands' farm and is concerned about what will happen if he does not take over:

> Hilt: ...I have to make up my mind what I'm going to do...that's all. An American company owns all the land around this place...eight sections. Now they want this farm too. Do you know what they'd do with the house here? They'd use it for a granary. They'd store wheat in the house I grew up in!... My grandfather broke this land. Rylands have lived here since before the first World War. (493)

Hilt takes pride in his heritage and obviously values the land and the people connected with it. Jeanne White Calf is trying to come to terms

with her own reality and to find an identity that does not necessarily exclude the past, but that neither entirely depends on it:

> Jeanne: It's your worry. I got my own worries. When we owned the land we didn't have to have power...except the sun and the running rivers. We didn't even say we owned the land then...we lived on it. A person could carry what he owned on his back or on a horse. At that Sun Dance I almost wished I didn't live now...I wished I could have lived before...
>
> Hilt: I know. Before we came.
>
> Jeanne: That's right. But it's too late for that...I've got to find some way to hold myself together now. (493)

Jeanne also values her heritage but realizes that, in order both to hold onto her heritage and to live in the White society, she requires something different. She is the Indian character who can make the bridge Jana failed to do.

Hilt has been sent by his hospitalized grandmother, Jeanne Ryland, to find both the medicine bag that she found when she and her husband first settled there, and also a sack of mementoes she has collected over the years. The Indian medicine bag and Hilt's question of how his grandmother came to have it carry the action into scene 2. The medicine bag links the beginning and the end of the play, as it links the past with the present and future for the characters in the play.

Act I takes us through thirty years (1910-1940) in the lives of the

Rylands and the White Calfs. In the late homestead years (1910) Jeanne and John Ryland arrive in southern Saskatchewan from Scotland with hopes and dreams, shared with thousands of other immigrants, of a safe and prosperous future. There are several references to the vastness of the land as intimidating and the need to fence in the property for protection and security. Jeanne feels at first "the flatness. The emptiness. I've never lived where there were no trees. Or hills. Or hedges....' I feel so small, John. Insignificant. Just grass and sky and space. It frightens me" (495); yet she quickly develops an intuitive understanding and feeling for the land., "White man like lots of fences" (496), White Calf says, but his people <u>are</u> the land and must have freedom and space. They are now confined to the fenced-in reservations that threaten to suffocate their spirit and way of life.

Of the white people, only Jeanne Ryland intuitively communicates with her Indian friends. She shares in their pains and hardships; White Calf is able to overcome his anger against "the White's war," which has wounded his eldest son, Tom, and thereby, to take part in Jeanne's life too. They take comfort in the proximity of each other when times are rough: they can see the smoke of each other's fire throughout the seasons. When Jeanne finds the medicine bag she has an immediate sense of the history of the place and the special spiritual qualities of the bag. Although she has not quite come to terms with her surroundings while coping alone on the farm when John is away at the First World War, she relies on the medicine bag, which has come to symbolize strength and endurance. Compared to Ruth in <u>Still Stands the House</u>, who was unable to cope with her situation, Jeanne, although she asks for help, is not

nearly as helpless or alienated:

> Jeanne: Help me. Whoever you are, whose life is in this bag, help me to endure. I've never told John how afraid I am without him here. I'm afraid of the sound of the wind at night. Afraid when the creak of the windmill wakes me or the house cracks as it settles in the cold. How afraid I am when the snow comes and there's no one nearer than five miles away. I never told John but I'm full of fear. Perhaps I should have taken Ryan home to Scotland like John wanted me to. Will I ever feel at home here? Help me to endure. (502)

The metaphors in this passage are linked to the senses (hearing, feeling). The sentences are short and repetition of the word "fear" or "afraid" occurs frequently. The sense-imagery and the use of repetition are poetic techniques which Ringwood makes use of in this and many other plays as we have seen. Compared to some of Ruth's monologues quoted earlier, the above use of language indicates a much more articulate and controlled character. That Ruth, in Jeanne's situation, would likely have given up, is evident in the sureness of Jeanne's language when compared to Ruth's in the passage below:

> Ruth: ...And you've shut me out!... He'll be like this hyacinth that's broken before it bloomed. (39)

Dowser's capacity as a well-witcher gives him a special power to help those around him build constructive relations with and

understandings of the place they inhabit. When John Ryland arrives on the prairie, Dowser tries to convince him to leave a little land unbroken, untouched. But as a newcomer, John has not yet learned how to "read" the prairie. He does not realize that man cannot own the land. Dowser speaks of the past inhabitants--the dinosaurs of the prairie--and beckons John to leave a little land in respect for them and history. Although John, unlike Gerth in Dark Harvest, does not use the land in an exploitive way and although he has eyes for "the prairie magic" (the mirage), he still seeks to dominate the land. Dowser and the White Calfs are satisfied with living on it, as Jeanne White Calf said in the beginning. They have been a part of the past and have a more spiritual relation with the land because they can respond to it without fear.

Later, during the Depression (Act I, scene 5), John admits to Dowser his blindness and wishes he had left some part untouched to shelter the soil which is now blowing away. In the mid-thirties on the drought-stricken prairie, the farmers meet with extremely harsh conditions and turn to each other for comfort. Nature demands the soil that they have worked so hard to farm and nothing but dust, despair and frustration exist. Their immigrant dreams drown in the dust. The neighbouring family, the Burkholts, unwillingly leave, but even after John Ryland's sudden death, the Ryland farm is kept going. In Mirage, one finds none of the hatred for the soil that recurs thematically in Still Stands the House and Dark Harvest. The pride of property and land is presented positively when John's son Ryan exclaims that "the wind's got to stop blowing some time" (519). Ringwood is now able to look at the Depression as only one part of a varied prairie experience.

Throughout his life, Dowser remains true to his vision of the land, the prairie. The prairie holds a vital part of history whose preservation is crucial. The prairie is as sacred to him as the medicine bag is to Jeanne. In contrast to the other characters', Dowser's opinions change little as we follow them through the Second World War, the 1944 election in Saskatchewan and the 1958 victory of John Diefenbaker. Ryan, as a farmer, is sorry to see the land being farmed by fertilizers and sprays, but realizes that in the modern era of technological development, such procedures are likely to be called "progress." With the years of depending on the land and nature, Ryan has come to respect and understand them and recognizes that harmonious relations with the land are vital for man's survival; that is, the demands of the land take precedence over ownership. This precedence of the land was what Gerth failed to see:

> Ryan: ...The Indians are right, Dowser. A man doesn't own the land. The land owns him. A man just holds it, in trust. You always felt that way. Yet you never worked the land.
>
> Dowser: No, but when I was witching a well I'd feel that willow stick tremble in my hand. After that a man can't feel separate any more. (543)

Although Ryan knows that his own personal relation with the land and the farm cannot be inherited by Hilt, he would like to see the farm kept in the family. The end of the play implies that Hilt and Jeanne White Calf will form the third generation to run the Ryland farm. The attitude presented here by the playwright is much more positive and constructive

than the one that she dramatized forty years earlier. Still Stands the House, for example, was dominated by darkness and isolation, and in Dark Harvest, Gerth exploited the soil--the former play desolate of hope and the latter only tentatively moving toward it.

The three generations of women in the Ryland family, Jeanne, Cissie, and Laura, are strongwilled women. Through the medicine bag Jeanne manages to influence her son Ryan and his wife Cissie to stay on the farm and not to sell; she sends Hilt out to find the medicine bag and her own flour sack of mementoes in order to persuade him to stay. Like Dowser, Jeanne is a constant figure in the play, and with her she carries the medicine bag and the flour sack, symbolizing past, present and future. The medicine bag provided Jeanne with hope during two wars and a Depression and it will sustain Hilt with "hopes, plans" and "work" (547).

Both Jeanne and Cissie Ryland are politically active women. Jeanne hires Joe Whipple, a young socialist, to help her out on the farm while John is away at war. Well aware that her involvement with the farmer's union makes her a target for Fred Burns, the mean-spirited real estate agent, Jeanne nevertheless stands up for her beliefs and refuses to let herself be threatened. Cissie is a strong and active supporter of the C.C.F. Her husband, Ryan, objects to her political activities, but Cissie continues her work regardless. Laura, their daughter, hints that Cissie's work interfered with her motherhood: "My earliest memory of my mother is waiting in the car while she canvassed for the N.D.P." (536). But Laura has a different commitment to the land than Cissie, who has lived and worked on the prairie all her life. Laura is not meant to

farm the land and feels that she must leave on her own quest. She has a gift for working with clay and knows that in order to be free she must break with her family ties. Dowser knows that in her decision Laura remains true to herself: "You have the power, Laura. Like I told you, you have the power" (539).

As well as being politically active, Jeanne and Cissie are mothers, nurturers and heads of the domestic work on the farm. Both women are left in charge by their husbands during their services in the wars. Unlike Jeanne, who was afraid but still coped, Cissie is guided by her pride and determination to be independent:

> Cissie: ...But I'll tell you something. I'm not having Al Marshall harvest the wheat I helped put in. I'm going to run this farm. I'm not sitting around in somebody's basement suite waiting for you to come home, Ryan. I'll get your mother down here with me and together we'll run this place. I'll run this farm somehow. (521)

Sisterhood unites these women; they draw their strength both from each other and from the desire to fulfill their personal goals.

All the characters in Mirage share some kind of commitment to the land. Except for Dowser and Jeanne, they all undergo changes. Dowser and Jeanne share a special feel for the land. Dowser knows that because the "untold secrets" (533) of the land, the magic of the mirage, the ancient bones of dinosaurs, fuel the love of the land and give the people strength to continue, they must keep it unchanged. He pleads with John Ryland and his son Ryan to leave some land, and with time they both come to an adequate understanding of the land. Dowser connects

with the "untold secrets" of the prairie through his special skill--water-witching.

At the end of the play, the third possible couple of the Ryland family, Hilt and Jeanne, share the magic of the mirage which has intrigued their people before them. "It is even more surprising than a rainbow" to Jeanne and symbolizes hope for the young couple. The land is at the centre of the characters' lives and the rituals and magic they perform and experience are rooted in the earth.[3] Mirage, as opposed to the trilogy, emphasizes the bond between the Whites and the Indians as two peoples of diverse cultures who nevertheless share a common history that is founded in their protection of the land. They are reconciled in the same understanding of the land and both sense the "magic" of the mirage.[4] To stress this point, the romantic reconciliation between Hilt Ryland and Jeanne White Calf could perhaps have been left out to avoid sentimentalizing and distracting the audience from the real point. Drum Song, although an extended piece of drama, works very well because it was first created as three short plays, which bring out Ringwood's strengths in creation of direct characterization, limited action and evocative dialogue. Mirage is a long play which requires an extended dramatic focus. Ringwood has perhaps attempted to cover too much history, while at the same time experimenting with sound effects, and with issues such as the role of women, politics and the prairie. Here we see some flaws in characterization that are not evident in the shorter plays--too many main characters are insufficiently developed. Also, Ringwood at times appears to insert scenes merely for the sake of

covering the 70 years of history across which the action extends. The majority of Ringwood's plays are one-act or shorter, and it seems that her strength as a dramatist lies in the compression demanded of this shorter form.

Although Mirage and Drum Song differ in form, they share certain themes: the spiritual preoccupation with the land from which all the characters draw their strength and the concern for aboriginal Canadians. Both plays incorporate the idea of man in the past, the present and the future. The strong characters and the poetic dialogue engage and move the audience or reader to compassion and understanding, while at the same time doing what all drama must do, namely entertain.

CONCLUSION

In 1940, Ringwood read a lecture on CKUA radio at the University of Alberta. In this lecture, entitled "So You Want To Be An Actor," she said,

> It is time for us to try to interpret the life we know and love to the rest of the world, unless we are content to go down as a people who were blind and inarticulate and afraid, a people who had nothing to say. (Ringwood "So You Want To Be An Actor" 1)

She had something to say and spent the next forty-four years doing so, interpreting the life she knew and loved through her drama.

Thematically, Ringwood has explored almost every aspect of the life she knew and of the history and people connected with the Canadian prairie: Canadian pioneers, prairie farmers, new immigrants of various ethnic origins, regional folk heroes, cowboys and Canada's native Indians. She began and ended with the land at the centre of her prairie plays, as the element which created the particular characteristics of her native Canadian region. She changed and developed her style and themes over the years, but what remained constant was her feeling for lyrical language, regional characterization and her own intuitive response to the land and its inhabitants. The development and progression in both the playwright and the person show an effort that took Ringwood through not only a variety of topics but also a variety of dramatic forms as she searched for a suitable expression of the western Canadian spirit. She moved from the tragic naturalism of the prairie tragedies through folk comedies of regional history to epic drama in the later stages of her life. The folk comedies of the prairies served to free her from the tragic naturalism which had excluded the prairie sense

of humour and the theme of community that Ringwood viewed as essential parts of prairie life. She was able, through the comedies of the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project, to change her focus from the individual in the tragedies to the prairie community focus in the farcical comedies. In turn, these comedies along with the growing skills and concerns of the playwright, enabled her to broaden her focus to include politics, Indians and the role of women in contemporary society. Ringwood began with the land as protagonist but later made the land and the community two interdependent forces. This development characterizes her most important achievement as a prairie playwright.

Her sense of the theatre and dramatic dialogue has its special place among Canada's early modern playwrights. The dialogue is sure and the language metaphoric. Many memorable passages for any audience or reader of her plays come to mind without difficulty: the outcry of the confined Ruth in Still Stands the House; Gerth's speech to God in Dark Harvest; the comic dialogue especially of The Rainmaker and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg; Jana's curse on Jason in Drum Song; or Jeanne Ryland's plea to the medicine bag in Mirage. Her poetic language has been characterized by powerful natural imagery, symbols and musical rhythms. Her writing largely preceded the rise of the professional theatre in Canada, and although her plays were frequently performed at theatre festivals, she attracted only sparse useful criticism over the years and never had a chance, as many playwrights have today, to work with a professional theatre company for an extended period. Inevitably her work suffered: in longer plays such as Stampede, Widger's Way and Mirage, she seems to have problems with an extended dramatic focus. There is a tendency to incorporate too much material and these plays have consequently been performed less frequently than her one-act plays. Some of her best and most frequently performed plays have been one-act

plays such as Still Stands the House, Pasque Flower and A Fine Coloured Easter Egg.

Out of her preoccupation with the land and the community came her concern for the role of women in those prairie communities and in contemporary society. The female figures of her early tragedies are obedient and subordinated wives who have little freedom or desire to pursue their individual interests. The female characters of her comedies are either mean-spirited gossipers (Dorinda and Bertha in The Jack and the Joker), or pliable women easily manipulated by romantic notions (Marg in The Rainmaker, Celia in Stampede and Roselle in Widger's Way). But her female characters gradually begin to free themselves as the playwright's social and political awareness grows. In Drum Song and Mirage, Ringwood has created strong, spirited and independent women who are liberated from the traditional and old-fashioned roles of her earlier plays. The women of Mirage are political activists as well as wives and mothers. The Indian women are fearless of pain and death, proud and able to free themselves (however tragically) from the oppression around them. The women in these last two plays (as well as in The Lodge) are complex characters who have strength and desire to struggle against the oppressive side of the society in which they live. This characterization of women had been unthinkable to the playwright at the beginning of her career in the 1930s.

In 1978, forty years after her lecture on the CKUA radio station, Ringwood spoke at the Third Conference of Inter-American Women Writers. By then Ringwood had spent all her life working in the challenging medium of drama and, when asked about the reason for the scarcity of women playwrights, her comments on the immediacy of drama were as much an expression of her own experience as women writers in general:

> Perhaps...women were afraid of the explosive emotion, the blood and the violence, the immediacy of drama. In fiction and poetry they could take time to explore nuances of feeling, shifting relationships, hidden games and festering rivalries and send these out to be published without such direct involvement with their acceptance or rejection. (Saddlemeyer 78)

Although at certain times in her life Ringwood too attempted fiction and poetry,[1] she dared to make the drama her primary vehicle of expression for the life she knew and loved. She therefore deserves to be celebrated as a dramatist who has also made an important contribution to the literary tradition of Western Canada. Gwen Ringwood is a regional playwright, but the regionalism of her plays imposes no limitations on the universality of the characters or themes she has created. Her contribution to Canadian literature is impressive; as a writer concerned with human relationships and human conflicts born of the Canadian soil, she takes her place among her contemporary prairie novelists.

BIOGRAPHY NOTES

1. Brief studies of the literary context of Ringwood's plays, particularly in relation to the fiction writers, are found in Diane Bessai's "Modern Prairie Drama" (1984) and in W.J. Keith's Canadian Literature in English (1985).

CHAPTER ONE NOTES

1. For a full study of Haynes's career and her influence on Alberta theatre, see Moira Day's Ph.D. thesis, "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes."

2. CKUA was founded in 1927 by the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta and was instrumental to the development of the theatre in the West during the 1930s, when there were almost no professional theatres.

3. As Betty Lee has pointed out, Still Stands the House, her best known one-act play, even to date, received the D.D.F.'s one hundred dollar prize for best Canadian play at the Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa in 1939, but did not actually make it to the final.

CHAPTER TWO NOTES

1. Ringwood in conversation with Diane Bessai June 1983 at the Learned Societies meeting in Vancouver.

2. All future references to Still Stands the House are to the Rutland edition of The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Still Stands the

House was first produced at Chapel Hill by the Carolina Playmakers in 1939. It was published by Samuel French in that same year.

3. It is worth contrasting the use of this image with Ross's use of it in "The Lamp at Noon," first published in Queen's Quarterly in 1938. A short passage from the story reveals the positive value of the lamp: "It shed a soft, diffused light, dim and yellow as if it were the light from the lamp reaching out through the open door" (Ross, The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories 13).

4. Pasque Flower was first performed at Chapel Hill in March of 1939 where Ringwood herself had the pleasure of directing it. It was also given its first publication in the Carolina Play-Book in 1939. All references to Pasque Flower are to the Rutland edition of The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood version.

5. Dark Harvest was first produced at the University of Manitoba in 1945 and published the same year by Thos. Nelson. It also won first prize in the Ottawa Little Theatre Competition in 1945. The version that will be referred to here is the first edition of Dark Harvest published in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

CHAPTER III NOTES

1. According to Gard all six plays were produced by CBC radio over National hook-ups. The plays are now kept in the Bruce Peel's Special Collection at the University of Alberta Library.

2. The Jack and the Joker was first performed in 1943 at the Banff School of Fine Arts and published in that same year by the University of

Alberta's Extension Department. All references to this play are from the version published in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

3. All references to The Rainmaker are from The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. This play was given its first production at Banff in 1944 and was published by the Extension Department.

4. All references to Stampede are from The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Stampede was first produced at Banff in 1946 and published the same year by the Extension Department. It was revived in a 1946 production at the University of Alberta.

CHAPTER IV NOTES

1. All references to this play are from The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. This play was first produced in Banff in 1941. It was published that same year in The Carolina Play-Book by Frederick Koch.

2. A Fine Coloured Easter Egg was written and produced in 1950 at Banff. That same year, it was adapted for CBC radio and is still being performed at regional theatre festivals in Canada. All references to this play are to The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

3. Widger's Way, written in 1952 for the Studio Theatre at the University of Alberta, was directed by Professor Robert Orchard, chair of the Drama Department, in its first production. It also toured in the mid-fifties. It was published by the Playwrights Co-op in 1976 before it was anthologized in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, on which edition the page references depend.

4. Part I, "Maya," won the first prize in the Ottawa Little Theatre

Competition in 1959 and was first published in Ten Canadian Short Plays, edited by John Stevens in 1975. Part II, "The Stranger," was written in 1971 for the opening of the Gwen Pharis Ringwood Outdoor Theatre at Boitanio Park, Williams Lake, B.C. Part III, "The Furies," was still in manuscript form in 1982 when it was performed within the trilogy. The last two parts were unpublished until all three appeared individually in their chronological order in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Drum Song was first produced for the official opening of the Phoenix Theatre, University of Victoria, in 1982 under the direction of Carl Hare. Professor Hare had proposed that Ringwood follow through with an idea she was already considering for combining the three short plays into a full evening's performance. For this occasion, she added the prologue and the choral passages; the trilogy is published as such in Richard Perkyn's anthology of Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-1984 in 1984.

CHAPTER V NOTES

1. Since the three plays will be dealt with as a trilogy, and not as they are anthologized in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, I will refer to Richard Perkyns' anthology of Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-1984.

2. Mirage was commissioned by Tom Kerr for the Learned Societies Meetings in 1979 in Saskatoon. It was directed by Tom Kerr in its first production at the University of Saskatoon in that year. Mirage was published in 1981 in Patrick O'Neil, ed. New Canadian Drama 2, and later in 1982 in The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, to which edition

the page numbers refer.

3. Frederick Phillip Grove has a similar description of the mirage phenomenon on the prairie in his Fruits of the Earth (135-36). He does not, however, incorporate the mirage-image into his major themes as Ringwood has done in Mirage.

4. It is worth noting a particular passage from John Newlove's poem The Pride in which some of the same attitudes are described:

> Until at
> last we become them
> in our desires, our desires,
> mirages, mirrors, that are theirs hard-
> riding desires, and they
> become our true forbears, moulded
> by the same wind or rain
> and in this land we
> are their people, come
> back to life. (Klinck, Canadian Anthology 563)

CONCLUSION NOTES

1. As mentioned earlier, she wrote the two novels and incorporated poetry into her plays.

Anthony, Geraldine. Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Boston: Twayne, 1981.

---. Stage Voices. Toronto: Doubleday, 1978.

Benson, Eugene & W.L. Conolly. English-Canadian Theatre. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1987.

Bessai, Diane. "Modern Prairie Drama in Its Literary Contexts" in Regionalism and National Identity. eds. Reginald Berry & James Acheson. Christchurch, New Zealand: The Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, 1985: 107-116.

Broderson, G.L. "Gwen Pharis--Canadian Dramatist" Manitoba Arts Review 4 (Spring, 1944), 3-20.

Day, Moira. "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes." [Ph.D. University of Toronto, 1987].

Day, Moira and Marilyn Potts. "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes: Initiator of Alberta Theatre" Theatre History in Canada 8:1 (Spring, 1987), 8-35.

Delgatty, Enid, ed. The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Ottawa: Borealis, 1982.

Fink, Howard. "CKUA: Radio Drama and Regional Theatre" Theatre History in Canada 8:2 (Fall, 1987), 221-33.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. New York: Atheneum, 1969.

Gard, Robert. Grassroots Theatre. Madison: U. of Wisconsin, 1955.

---. Six Alberta Folklore Plays. Edmonton: U. of Alberta Printing, 1945.

Harrison, Dick. "Cultural Insanity" in Figures in a Ground. Eds. D. Bessai & D. Jackel. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1978: 278-294.

Henderson, Archibald, ed. Pioneering a People's Theatre. Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina, 1945.

Hinchcliffe, Judith. "Still Stands the House: The Failure of the Pastoral Drama" Canadian Drama 3:2 (Fall, 1977), 183-91.

Keith, W.J. Canadian Literature in English. London: Longman, 1988.

Klinck, Carl, and Watters, Reginald, eds. Canadian Anthology. Toronto: Gage, 1974.

Lee, Betty. Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival, Toronto: M & S, 1973.

Lynde, Denyse. "The Dowser Character in the Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood" Ariel 18:1 (Jan., 1987), 27-37.

MacEwan, Grant. Eye Opener Bob: The Story of Bob Edwards. Edmonton: Institute of Applied Arts, 1957.

---. John Ware's Cow Country. Edmonton: Institute of Applied Arts, 1960.

Ostenso, Martha. Wild Geese. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967.

Perkyns, Richard, ed. Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-1984. Toronto: Irwin, 1984.

Ringwood, Gwen Pharis. "Realism and Its Discontents" [Unpublished manuscript in the possession of Diane Bessai.]

---. "So You Want To Be An Actor" CKUA Radio Correspondence Course. Edmonton: Department of Extension, U of Alberta, 1940.

Ross, Sinclair. The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1936.

Saddlemeyer, Ann. "Circus Feminus: 100 Plays by English-Canadian Women" Room of One's Own 8:2 (July, 1983), 78-91.

Stevens, John, ed. Ten Canadian Short Plays. New York: Dell Publishing, 1975.

Stuart, Euan Ross. The History of Prairie Theatre. Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1984.

Szaffko, Peter. "The Indian in Contemporary North American Drama" Canadian Drama 13:2 (1987), 182-86.

Wagner, Anton. "Gwen Pharis Ringwood Rediscovered" Canadian Theatre Review 5 (Winter, 1975), 63-69.

WORKS CONSULTED

Anthony, Geraldine. Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Boston: Twayne, 1981.

---. "The Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood: An Appraisal" Atlantis 4:1 (1978), 132-41.

---. "The Ringwood Plays of Social Protest" Canadian Drama 5:2 (1979), 112-28.

---, ed. Stage Voices. Toronto: Doubleday, 1978.

Ball, John and Richard Plant. Eds., A Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History, 1583-1975. Toronto: Doubleday, 1976.

Benazon, Michael. "Ringwood's Saskatchewan mirage" Canadian Theatre Review 24 (Fall, 1979), 122-23.

Benson, Eugene & L.W. Conolly. English-Canadian Theatre. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1981.

Bessai, Diane. "Modern Prairie Drama in its Literary Contexts" in Regionalism and National Identity. eds. Berry & Acheson. Christchurch, New Zealand: The Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, 1985.

---. "The Regionalism of Canadian Drama" Canadian Literature 85 (June, 1980), 7-20.

---. "Women, Feminism and Prairie Theatre" Canadian Theatre Review 43 (1985), 28-43.

Broderson, G.L. "Gwen Pharis--Canadian Dramatist" Manitoba Arts Review 4 (Spring, 1944), 3-20.

Brown, E.K. On Canadian Poetry. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943.

Day, Moira. Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. [Ph.D. University of Toronto, 1987].

Day, Moira and Marilyn Potts. "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes: Initiator of Alberta Theatre" Theatre History in Canada 8:1 (Spring, 1987), 8-35.

Delgatty, Enid. ed. The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Ottawa: Borealis, 1982.

Esslin, Martin. The Field of Drama. London: Methuen, 1987.

Feldheim, Marvin, ed. Comedy: Plays, Theory and Criticism. New York: Harcourt, 1962.

Fink, Howard. "CKUA: Radio Drama and Regional Theatre" Theatre History in Canada 8:2 (Fall, 1987), 221-33.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. New York: Atheneum, 1969.

Gard, Robert. Community Theatre: Idea and Achievement. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959.

---. Grassroots Theatre. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1955.

---. Johnny Chinook: Tall Tales and True from the Canadian West. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1967.

---, ed. Alberta Folklore Quarterly, I-II. Edmonton: U of Alberta, 1945.

---. Six Alberta Folklore Plays. Edmonton: U of Alberta Printing, 1946.

Gowan, Elsie Park. "The Edmonton Little Theatre--Past and Present" Curtain Call 2 (March, 1941), 7.

---. "There's Drama in them there Hills: Being an Account of the Summer Drama Course at Banff" Curtain Call 7 (October, 1935), 14.

Grove, Frederick Phillip. Fruits of the Earth. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965.

Harrison, Dick. "Cultural Insanity" in Figures in a Ground. Eds. Bessai & Jackel. Saskatchewan: Prairie Books, 1978.

Henderson, Archibald, ed. Pioneering a People's Theatre. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1945.

Hinchcliffe, Judith. "Still Stands the House: The Failure of the Pastoral Drama" Canadian Drama 3:2 (Fall, 1977), 183-91.

Keith, W.J. Canadian Literature in English. London: Longman, 1985.

Klinck, Carl, and Waters. eds. Canadian Anthology. Toronto: Gage, 1974.

Koch, Frederick. "Canadian Frontier Theatre" Carolina Play-Book 13 (December, 1940), 169-70.

---. "Canadian Indian Folk Drama" Carolina Play-Book 12 (December, 1939), 108.

---. "Canadian Prairie Play: Alberta Farm Folk" Carolina Play-Book 12 (March, 1939), 4-6.

---. "Gwen Pharis" Carolina Play-Book 12 (December, 1939), 118.

---. "Folk Drama Defined" Carolina Play-book 12 (September, 1939), 66-69.

---. "Western Canada: A New Playmaker From the Alberta Prairie" Carolina Play-Book 11 (June, 1938), 34-36.

Lee, Betty. Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973.

Leighton, David. Artists, Builders and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982.

Lynde, Denyse. "The Dowser Character in the Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood" Ariel 18:1 (Jan., 1987): 27-37.

Lynn, Kenneth. The Comic Tradition in America. Garden City: Doubleday, 1958.

MacEwan, Grant. Eye Opener Bob: The Story of Bob Edwards. Edmonton:

Institute of Applied Arts, 1957.

---. John Ware's Cow Country. Edmonton: Institute of Applied Arts, 1960.

Orchard, Robert. "Widger's Way" Edmonton Journal (March 12), 1952.

Ostenso, Martha. Wild Geese. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967.

Perkyns, Richard, ed. Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934-1984. Toronto: Irwin, 1984.

Ringwood, Gwen Pharis. Dark Harvest. CTR 5 (Winter, 1975), 72-128.

---. The Rainmaker. Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1975.

---. "Realism and Its Discontents" [Unpublished manuscript].

---. "So You Want To Be An Actor" CKUA Radio Correspondence Course. Edmonton: Department of Extension, University of Alberta, 1940, 1-10.

---. Still Stands the House. New York: Samuel French, 1939.

---. "Trouping to the North" Carolina Play-Book 11 (December, 1938), 11-14.

---. Widger's Way. Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1976.

---. "Women and the Theatrical Tradition" Atlantis 4:1 (1978), 154-58.

Ross, Sinclair. As For Me and My House. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957.

---. The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968.

Rourke, Constance. American Humour. Garden City: Doubleday, 1953.

Rutland, Enid Delgatty, ed. The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood. Ottawa: Borealis, 1982.

Saddlemeyer, Ann. "Circus Feminus: 100 Plays by English-Canadian Women"

Room of One's Own 8:2 (July, 1983), 78-91.

Spearman, Walter. The Carolina Playmakers: The First Fifty Years. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1970.

Stevens, John, ed. Ten Canadian Short Plays. New York: Dell Publishing, 1975.

Stuart, Euan Ross. The History of Prairie Theatre. Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1984.

Szaffko, Peter. "The Indian in Contemporary North American Drama" Canadian Drama 13:2 (1987), 182-86.

Tait, Michael. "Playwrights in a Vacuum" Canadian Literature 16 (1963), 5-18.

Wagner, Anton. "Elsie Park Gowan: Distinctively Canadian" Theatre History in Canada 8:1 (Spring, 1987), 68-82.

---. "Gwen Pharis Ringwood Rediscovered" Canadian Theatre Review (Winter, 1975), 63-69.